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- EURO 2016 REFLECTIONS

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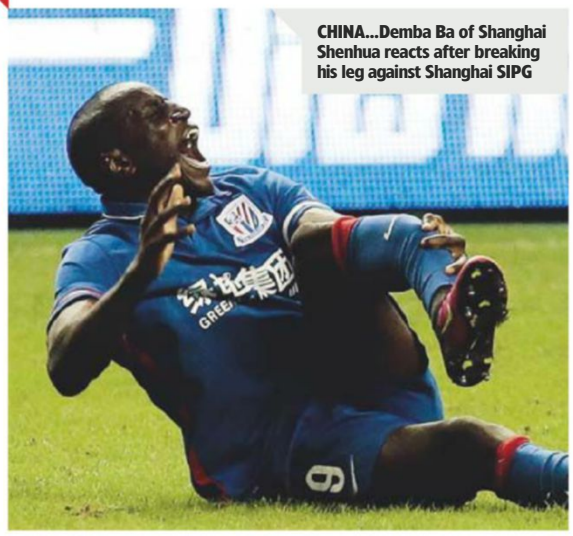

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FROM THE EDITOR

Just a few weeks after Portugal celebrated winning Euro 2016, the European club season is back. And so is our guide to the new league campaigns – 34 of them (page 51). Not that football stopped for the European summer break – there's Atletico Nacional's victory in the Libertadores Cup (page 28) for starters.

It is also just a few weeks since British people voted to leave the European Union, an act of economic suicide that could have serious implications for football.

World Soccer was launched in 1960 to feed a growing interest in the European game. A few years earlier, Chelsea had rejected an invitation to be England's representatives in the European Champions Cup. But Real Madrid's victory over Eintracht Frankfurt at Hampden Park in 1960 changed all that.

> *World Soccer* has always sought to reach the parts that other publications cannot, or will not, reach

World Soccer has always sought to reach the parts that other publications cannot, or will not, reach. It has always been our belief that insularity can be dangerous and that English football has benefitted from outside influences.

We're proud to play an active role as the UK member of the European Sports Media (ESM) group – and I hope we will continue to do so for many years to come.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

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6 PSG set to continue reign in France ..... page 60
7 Higuain leaves Napoli for Juventus ..... page 78
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9 Players leave Turkey in aftermath of coup ..... page 100
10 France win European Under-19 title ..... page 124

City boy...Leroy Sane surveys his new surroundings

ENGLAND

€50m price tag makes Sane most expensive German

Manchester City's €50m signing of Leroy Sane from Schalke made the 20-year-old the most expensive German footballer of all time.

The fee paid by City eclipsed the €44m paid by Arsenal to Real Madrid for Mesut Ozil in 2013 and was more than the €38m paid this year by Bayern Munich to Dortmund for defender Mats Hummels.

The Sane deal means that English clubs have spent in excess of €400m on Bundesliga players in the past two years. Manchester City alone have spent €162 million on three Bundesliga players (Sane, Ilkay Gundogan, Kevin De Bruyne) in the past 12 months.

Already this summer, Bundesliga players have moved to England at a cost of €199million. In addition to Sane, they include Granit Xhaka (Borussia Monchengladbach to Arsenal, €45m), Henrikh Mkhitaryan (Borussia Dortmund to Manchester United, €42m), Gundogan (Borussia Dortmund to Manchester City, €27m), Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg (Bayern Munich to Southampton, €15m) and Loris Karius (Mainz to Liverpool, €6m).

Players also moved within the Bundesliga for large sums. In addition to the €38m for Hummels to Bayern, Andre Schurrle joined Dortmund from Wolfsburg for €30m and Mario Gotze left Bayern to return to Dortmund in a €26m deal.

"You can betray these people if you have no shame"

Napoli president, Aurelio De Laurentiis, describes the €90million departure of striker Gonzalo Higuain to Juventus as treachery towards all Neapolitans

Europe's top summer transfers

Investment...Juventus have brought in Gonzalo Higuain

Gonzalo Higuain Napoli to Juventus €90m
Leroy Sane Schalke to Manchester City €50m
Granit Xhaka Borussia Monchengladbach to Arsenal €45m
Henrikh Mkhitaryan Borussia Dortmund to Manchester United €42m
Sadio Mane Southampton to Liverpool €41.2m
Michy Batshuayi Marseille to Chelsea €39m
Eric Bailly Villarreal to Manchester United €38m
Mats Hummels Borussia Dortmund to Bayern Munich €38m
N'Golo Kante Leicester City to Chelsea €35.8m
Renato Sanches Benfica to Bayern Munich €35m
Andre Gomes Valencia to Barcelona €35m
Grzegorz Krychowiak Sevilla to Paris Saint-Germain €33.6m
Kevin Gameiro Sevilla to Atletico Madrid €32m
Gabriel Jesus Palmeiras to Manchester City €32m
Arkadiusz Milik Ajax to Napoli €32m
Miralem Pjanic Roma to Juventus €32m
Alvaro Morata Juventus to Real Madrid €30m
Andre Schurrle Wolfsburg to Borussia Dortmund €30m
Georginio Wijnaldum Newcastle United to Liverpool €27.5m
Ilkay Gundogan Borussia Dortmund to Manchester City €27m
Breel Embolo Basle to Schalke €27.5m
Mario Gotze Bayern Munich to Borussia Dortmund €26m

(up to and inc 03.08.16)

Record...Sadio Mane is the most expensive African player

HEROES & VILLAINS

CRISTIANO RONALDO

The Real Madrid man was honoured when his home island of Madeira named their international airport after him following Portugal's Euro 2016 success.

MIGUEL BORJA

Scored five times in four games – in the Libertadores semi-final and Final – as Atletico Nacional claimed their second South American club title.

XAVI

The former Barcelona midfielder donated his yacht to a charity that will auction it off and use the funds to help save refugees who cross the Mediterranean Sea.

Charity...Xavi donated his boat

FRANCESCO TOTTI

The veteran forward, preparing for his 25th season with Roma, said: "Footballers today are a bit like nomads. They follow money and not their hearts. Maybe that is the difference between me and all the others."

Loyal...Francesco Totti has spent all his career at Roma

BEIJING STADIUM AUTHORITIES

The appalling state of the pitch at the Birds Nest stadium in Beijing meant that Manchester City and Manchester United, despite flying hundreds of miles, could not play their pre-season friendly in China.

Cancelled...Birds Next stadium was to host the derby

FABRICE LOKEMBO-LOKASO

The former Charleroi and Congolese player was jailed after he tried to smuggle 10 Afghan migrants into Britain in a van. He was arrested in Calais as he tried to board a ferry to Dover.

Jailed...Fabrice Lokembo-Lokaso was people smuggling

VITALY MUTKO

The World Anti-Doping Agency accused the president of the Russian Football Federation, who is also his country's sports minister, of intervening to cover up the positive tests provided by 11 domestic players and one Russian-based foreigner.

CHESTERFIELD

The English third-tier side had to apologise to fans after admitting that the winning entry in a competition to follow the team on their pre-season tour of Hungary was faked.

"I'm a guy who can't sit and have one or two glasses. I have to drink until I fall over. They said to me: 'If you keep going with this life, you will die.' And I had an encounter with Jesus after 18 caipirinhas and 14 long necks [of beer]"

Former Real Madrid and Roma defender Cicinho on his battle with alcoholism

GOALS we'd like to see again

To see video footage of these goals, and many more that we have selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to http://po.st/w4LAPa

1 SALOMON RONDON
West Bromwich Albion v Vitesse
Curls a free-kick in off the underside of the bar during a pre-season friendly in Arnhem.

2 ANDREI ARSHAVIN
Kairat v Taraz
The former Arsenal forward turns his marker, checks back and then chips the keeper to score in the Kazakh League.

3 RIYADH MAHREZ
Leicester City v Celtic
Cuts inside onto his left foot, baffles a defender with a step-over and then curls a shot past the keeper.

4 VEDAD IBISEVIC
Hertha Berlin v Brondby
An overhead kick in the Europa League qualifiers.

5 WELLINGTON
Fluminense v Ponte Preta
Chips the keeper from the edge of the penalty area.

6 MARIANO DIAZ
Real Madrid v Chelsea
Hits a right-foot shot from 25 yards following some good build-up play in a friendly in the International Champions Cup series.

WINNERS

JEONBUK MOTORS
Set a new K-League record with a 3-0 win over Gwangju to record their 23rd game in a row without defeat.

ATLETICO NACIONAL
Twenty-seven years after their first success, the Colombian side won the Libertadores Cup for a second time.

FRANCE
Claimed their third European Under-19 title with a 4-0 victory over Italy in this year's Final.

EDINBURGH CLUBS
Both Hibernian and Hearts were knocked out of the Europa League in the qualifying campaign, by Brondby and Birkirkara respectively.

CELTIC
The former European Cup winners lost 1-0 to Lincoln Red Imps of Gibraltar in a Champions League qualifier.

FANS IN BEIJING
Chinese supporters paid up to £300 a ticket for a Man City v Man United friendly that was rained off.

LOSERS

"The quality simply was too bad. The first phase was incredibly long-winded, a horror"

Nice coach Lucien Favre gives Euro 2016 the thumbs down

Headliner

Macnelly Torres

Libertadores triumph sees return of the Mac

Just as he seemed to be on a downward curve, playmaker Macnelly Torres came good once again, with his contribution to Atletico Nacional's Libertadores Cup triumph the crowning glory of a career that has always been worth watching.

A master of the defence-splitting pass, the Colombian is reminiscent of Carlos Valderrama. The two are from the same Caribbean region on the country's north eastern coast, and Torres began his career at Atletico Junior, in his home town of Barranquilla, the club where Valderrama played his finest football.

However, it was with modest Cucuta, near the Venezuelan border, that Torres first came to continental attention, winning the domestic league in 2006 and then leading the side on an extraordinary adventure in which they came very close to reaching the Libertadores Final in 2007.

> A master of the defence-splitting pass, the Colombian is reminiscent of Carlos Valderrama

Nearly five years later, when Jose Pekerman became coach of Colombia's national side, one of his first moves was to find a place for Torres, who became a key player in the successful 2014 World Cup qualification campaign. By the time the tournament came around, however, Torres had blown his chances, accepting a move to Al Shabab of Saudi Arabia.

Warned against making the move by Valderrama and Juan Pablo Angel, his then team-mate at Atletico Nacional, Torres went for the money, but playing in such an undemanding environment saw his fitness levels fall and he didn't make the finals.

After missing the party in Brazil, he returned to Colombia at the start of last year, first with Junior and then rejoining Nacional, where he had enjoyed a successful spell between 2011 and 2013.

By the end of the year he had won another league title, but there were signs of decline. He was not often used for the full 90 minutes and a recall to the national team proved short lived, being substituted at half-time in November's home defeat to Argentina. And at the start of the Libertadores campaign he was not in the team, forced out by the loan signing of Victor Ibarbo and watching from the sidelines as Nacional racked up a succession of early victories.

But Torres' time would come. Ibarbo was injured, then his loan expired, and the 31-year-old grabbed the chance.

Torres came into the side after Nacional lost away to Rosario Central in the quarter-final first leg. Needing three goals in front of their own fans in the return, he scored the first and made the second.

Making sure he was fully fit for the remainder of the tournament, he gave a masterclass against Sao Paulo in the semis and Independiente Del Valle in the Final. Linking the play together with his passing, patiently working to open up space, and then striking with the killer ball, Torres was the star turn that he had always promised to become.

Like one of his elaborate passing moves, Macnelly Torres may not have taken the most direct path to the top, but he has made the long route look very scenic.

Tim Vickery

Finish...Macnelly Torres scores against Rosario Central

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Football can't take moral high ground over doping

A cackle of barely suppressed laughter could be heard all the way from Zurich, along the twisting roads to Lausanne, as the International Olympic Committee tripped headlong over its moral compass amid the Russian doping farrago.

Not that FIFA has any right to self-satisfaction after the litany of scandals generated by the venal avarice of a long list of leaders, directors, officials and hangers-on, past and present.

But Schadenfreude was a popular word considering how IOC president Thomas Bach had lectured FIFA on how his movement had sorted itself out two decades ago.

The IOC's sin was in shutting its eyes to doping malpractice under its nose in the sports which comprise the heart of its Olympic programme, such as track and field athletics, swimming, rowing and weightlifting.

This is not to say that doping is not an issue in football. The use of substances on the World Anti-Doping Agency's banned list is suspected to be more prevalent than admitted, but often it's only so-called "social drugs" which are uncovered by random testing.

The muddle around doping in football was underlined with the case of Liverpool defender Mamadou Sakho. His reputation and career were scarred after France's then vice-captain tested positive for a "fat burner" after a Europa League tie against Manchester United at Old Trafford in March.

He served an initial 30-day suspension but the ban was not extended after further investigation doubted whether the specific substance was even on the WADA banned list.

But before UEFA tardily reached the conclusion that Sakho had no case to answer, France coach Didier Deschamps had been left with no option but to drop the 26-year-old from *Les Bleus*' Euro 2016 squad.

The Olympic doping storm followed media investigations and interviews which prompted WADA to commission reports containing damning allegations about a state-led Russian strategy of doping and cover-up. The second report was compiled, hurriedly, by Canadian law professor Richard McLaren, provoking demands – which the IOC ultimately ignored – for a blanket ban of Russia from the Rio Olympics.

> McLaren's report also alleged an additional 11 positive tests of Russian players had been 'made to disappear' between 2011 and 2015

Football was not directly involved since Russia had failed to qualify for both the men's and women's Olympic tournaments. However, McLaren's report did point a finger for responsibility at Russian sports minister Vitaly Mutko, who is also president of both his country's 2018 World Cup organising committee and the Russian Football Union, as well as a member of the FIFA Council and UEFA executive committee.

In his report, McLaren said it was "inconceivable" that Mutko had not been aware of what was being undertaken in the name of Russian sporting ambition.

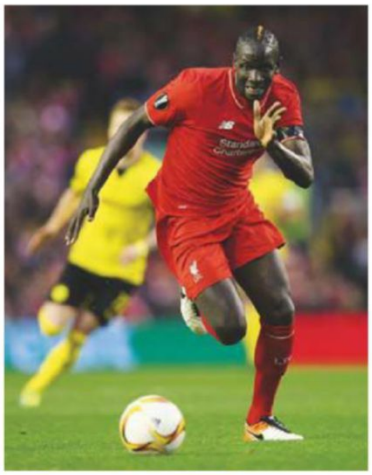
In his 110-page dossier, McLaren notes that Mutko in person had "saved" a foreign footballer playing in Russia from discovery under a sophisticated cover-up system operated with the connivance of the Moscow anti-doping laboratory. McLaren's report also alleged an additional 11 positive tests of Russian players had been "made to disappear" between 2011 and 2015.

McLaren said that during his investigation he had undertaken an interview with Mutko which had proved "singularly unhelpful". This would not have surprised FIFA ethics investigator Cornel Borbely, who had been blanked similarly when he was tasked with checking out Russia's bid to host the 2018 World Cup.

Borbely, then assistant to Michael Garcia, had been handed the Russia brief because the American attorney was barred from Russia over his work for the US DoJ in a previous, unrelated criminal investigation.

When Borbely demanded to see Russia's bid

Accused...Russian sports minister and World Cup boss Vitaly Mutko



Ban... Mamadou Sakho missed the Euro finals

documentation he was told it no longer existed because the computers had been taken only on hire and since been returned and wiped.

McLaren's report prompted a string of recommendations from WADA which included pointing up the need for "the FIFA Ethics Committee to look into allegations concerning football and the role played by a member of its executive committee, minister Vitaly Mutko".

Whether this will go anywhere remains doubtful. Mutko and the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, go back a very long way, to their respective KGB and political roots in St Petersburg.

Notably, though Putin approved the suspensions of a number of sports ministry officials named by McLaren, Mutko did not figure among them.

Indeed, when the IOC decided not to impose a blanket Olympic ban on Russia, it was almost as if Mutko had achieved a personal triumph.

The fuss will not go away completely. Once the Olympics are out of the way, and Europe's 2018 World Cup qualifying competition begins in September, inevitable demands that Russia be stripped of the finals will emanate from long-time critics in the media and headline-chasing politicians.

With there being very little chance of that happening, it seems Mutko will have triumphed once again.

Curious case of Del Nero

If Brazil end their Olympic blank in Rio, it's highly likely that taking as much credit as anyone will be Brazil federation president Marco Polo Del Nero. The fact that he is wanted in the United States will be neither here nor there.

Del Nero is among the 40-plus individuals and corporations indicted by the US Justice Department over the $200million FIFAGate money-laundering and fraud conspiracy case. However, as long as he remains in Brazil, he is beyond the hand of US law as no Brazilian citizen, under a clause in the constitution, can be extradited for trial.

Every now and again, parliamentary inquiries into corruption within the CBF are organised. But as Ricardo Teixeira escaped scrutiny on several occasions, there is no reason to believe Del Nero will be brought down. Indeed, having quit as a FIFA and CONMEBOL ExCo member – because he could not leave Brazil – Del Nero stepped down twice as CBF president before resuming the role this past spring as if nothing had happened.

Wanted...Marco Polo Del Nero

FIFA, while happy to send a "normalisation committee" to sort out the AFA chaos in neighbouring Argentina, has nothing to say about Del Nero.

Who knows, he might even welcome his Olympic guests with a bagful of expensive luxury watches just to show there are no hard feelings...

Niersbach ban is test for Infantino

Wolfgang Niersbach's ongoing membership of the governing councils of FIFA and UEFA offers an early test of whether Gianni Infantino was serious in his protestations over the controversial rule change rushed through the Mexico City congress in May.

On that occasion, congress voted for a clause which ripped the technical rug of independence from beneath the judicial committees – including the ethics chamber – as a means of provoking the resignation of Domenico Scala as audit and compliance chairman.

Scala and Infantino fell out over a number of issues, notably what Infantino termed an "insulting" pay offer and the methodology used to appoint Fatma Samoura as secretary-general.

Infantino justified the regulatory change as permitting the instant replacement of any judicial committee members who had fallen foul of the law. Certainly there was a need for such a power but it should have been vested within the ethics committee and not directly in the patronage of the president himself. This was why the appointment of Tomasz Vesel as Scala's successor was not greeted with wholehearted applause.

Still standing... Wolfgang Niersbach

Niersbach, former president of the German DFB, was barred from football for a year by the ethics committee for trying to hush up the controversy over unexplained monies flying in and out of the 2006 World Cup bid and then organising committees.

Yet, in continuing to protest his innocence, he may carry on as if nothing had happened while following a long, drawn-out appeals path. By all good sense, he should be stood down from featuring in the decision-making process while his appeals are considered, for the sake of transparency and credibility.

Infantino has the power to make it happen. He made sure of that himself in Mexico City.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

The game's in crisis, but we get the football we deserve

Dull...the Euro Final between France (in blue) and Portugal needed extra-time before the only goal of the game

Over a six-week span this summer, three of the game's most important Finals failed to produce spectacular – or even half-way decent – visions of the sport.

The Finals of the Copa America, the Champions League and the European Championship produced a total of just three goals – and all three dragged on into extra-time, with two decided by a shoot-out.

To broaden the gloom, there's the most recent World Cup Final. What should have been a wonderful evening in the Rio sunshine was another overtime bore, a dull 1-0 game.

Four extra-time Finals, just four goals in 480 minutes of football. One goal every two hours.

That is football in 2016; the world's most entertaining sport reduced to tedium. A sport that struggles to produce even one goal on its great days and then has to fall back on a farcical tie-breaker to come up with a winner.

Assuredly, this is crisis time – and doubly so because the sport itself sees nothing wrong. But this is not a temporary aberration, it has been building up for years, as the money pours in and the frenetic marketing hype and showbiz hoopla surrounding these fraudulent Finals gets louder and brassier.

Not a word of concern is heard from FIFA or IFAB or UEFA. Some years back, after an exhibition game in New York between Roma and Real Madrid had finished 0-0, I complained to an English marketing expert (that's how he was introduced to me) about the lack of goals. "Well," he replied, "We don't want basketball scores, do we?"

A fatuous answer born of fatuous thinking. I especially indict English attitudes in this crisis.

We hear them repeatedly in broadcasts of Premier League games, as commentators applaud violent tackles, as players "go down too easily", as referees are praised for "letting 'em play" – which can only mean "letting 'em foul" – and then crucified for daring to give out a red card.

The English prefer a physical game and it is their view that dominates the world game. A physical and a defensive game rules. Negative tactics have resulted in a constipated sport in which two essentials of the Beautiful Game – rhythm and flow – don't stand a chance. Not only goals, but shots on goal and even goalmouth action are in short supply.

It is a warped view that found voice on UEFA's website after the Euro Final. "Who needs goals for drama?" read a heading. Another fatuous comment.

I have complained about the marketing influence on football, which seems to me to be entirely baleful. Perversely, it should be the marketing people who demand a more attractive "product".

The Americans, masters of marketing, do things a lot better.

They – and that means the rich team-owners – are aware that sports need a balance between attack and defence. Scoring must not be too easy, nor too difficult. If the owners see their sport veering off in one or the other direction, they act to restore the balance.

Nothing like this ever happens in football. During some 60 years of involvement, I have never happened upon a serious discussion of "balance" in football, which lumbers along without any guiding light.

Football needs an independent panel to keep the sport under constant surveillance, to report on what it sees as negative trends and recommend corrective action.

And then? Well, then the problems begin. Could the panel demand action? Could it really be independent of FIFA and IFAB influence? Who would pay for it? And who would select its members?

> A goal every two hours. That is football in 2016; the world's most entertaining sport reduced to tedium

Maybe we get the football we deserve. An ugly game for an intolerant world. I'd rather not believe that. But no, I can't answer any of the questions I just asked. I only know that some version of them needs to be asked.

Is a discussion of football's future beyond the vision of its current masters? WS

"Even the best rider cannot clear the fences if his horse isn't good enough"

New Anderlecht coach Rene Weiler demands squad reinforcements

Headliner

Edgardo Bauza

New Argentina coach aims to woo Messi back to national side

Edgardo Bauza, who has replaced Gerardo Martino as Argentina's national coach, faces the double challenge of picking up the country's World Cup qualifying campaign after the disappointment of losing the Copa America Final on penalties to Chile – and persuading Lionel Messi to return to the international fold.

Martino departed after a second successive defeat to Chile, while a tearful Messi announced his retirement from international football – partly in frustration at the ongoing problems at the Argentinian federation, where a FIFA "normalisation committee" is now running things.

The appointment of a new coach was complicated by the situation at the AFA, with financial constraints limiting the choices available.

Mauricio Pocchetino and Diego Simeone were never serious candidates, even on a part-time basis, while Jorge Sampaoli, the former Chile boss who took over at Sevilla this summer, was also out of reach for the AFA.

Other names floated included Celta Vigo coach Eduardo Berizzo, Ramon Diaz and Miguel Angel Russo, before the AFA settled on Bauza, twice a Libertadores Cup winner – with LDU Quito in 2008 and San Lorenzo in 2014.

Bauza's biggest challenge will be persuading Messi to return to the fold.

"I'm optimistic about Messi," he explained. "I hope the chat with him will help for him to carry on in the national team. I want to explain to Messi what my idea is. The least of my worries is his position on the pitch.

"The idea is to travel to Barcelona and chat with Messi, not to convince him of anything, just to talk about football.

"He has played many positions and in all of them done well, has been a match winner. We will see what is the best place to use him. The idea is to travel and speak also to four or five senior players. There is not much time, the games are coming up."

"I hope the chat with him will help for him to carry on in the national team" Edgardo Bauza on Lionel Messi

Bauza was speaking in Brazil, where he has been coach of Sao Paulo for the past eight months. A former central defender who won three caps for Argentina, he has a reputation as a pragmatic coach, but it is a tag that Bauza rejects, saying: "I'm one of those who think that everybody has to defend. Football today is like that.

"You can defend in your opponents' half if the pressure is high but it's easier when you have players of the quality of the Argentina team. The options they offer you are many."

Argentina are third in the 10-nation South American World Cup qualifying group with 11 points from six matches, two points behind leading pair Uruguay and Ecuador. Their next qualifiers are at home to Uruguay and away to Venezuela in the first week of September.

John Holmesdale

Plea...will Messi change his mind?

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Big Sam and the decline of the international game

England have become dedicated followers of fashion in modern football, so it was hardly surprising that they opted for Sam Allardyce as their new manager.

He is known as "Big Sam" – but only in England. Elsewhere, he is relatively obscure.

Italy and Spain had already made exactly the same move after Euro 2016, putting new men in charge of the national side who are appreciated at home but mostly unknown to a wider audience.

None have major reputations. Italy's choice, Giampiero Ventura, is a veteran boss of 18 different clubs, the last of which was Torino. Meanwhile, the Spanish went for Julen Lopetegui, who spent four years working with junior national sides and then a difficult 19 months at Porto without winning a trophy.

Having sacked Marc Wilmots in the wake of a disappointing Euro tournament, Belgium are also looking for a new coach. And they are now advertising the post after being rejected by Louis Van Gaal – powerful evidence that club football is now utterly dominant, that the finest managers want to work in the Champions League and win domestic titles.

In Italy, the initial hope was to lure home Claudio Ranieri after his astonishing Premier League title success with Leicester City. Yet he felt his current job is more fun, more engaging and undoubtedly more lucrative. Would a proud and patriotic man like Ranieri have said no to the *Azzurri* 30 years ago? It is most unlikely, but the kudos of international football has diminished since its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s.

When Allardyce accepted the call from the Football Association he said it was the best job in English football – but that is only for a manager who has never been invited to take charge of a major club.

If the choice had been between England and Manchester United, he would have gone to Old Trafford without hesitation, not least because the salary would have been 300 per cent higher.

Managers and coaches also much prefer the day-to-day working life at a club. On his arrival at Chelsea, after two years with the Italian national side, Antonio Conte commented that "I can breathe the grass again".

Hunger...Sam Allardyce

The frustrations of an international football manager are many. There is precious little time with the players, few matches, and the concentration of work that you are truly judged is at a summer tournament once every two years.

> Club football is now utterly dominant, and the finest managers want to work in the Champions League and win domestic titles

Allardyce, naturally for an ebullient man, came roaring into his new job full of energy and optimism. It is an unexpected opportunity for him to prove his worth and give substance to bold claims of the past that he would be an instant success if ever he had the chance to manage Real Madrid or Internazionale.

It is a fascinating appointment, and probably a good one. England do not lack for talent in the current generation of players, but as the monumental collapse of nerve against Iceland at Euro 2016 illustrated, they lack the required fibre and fortitude.

Allardyce's charisma and certainty of purpose could be a perfect fit, although the doubters will point to his lack of international experience and argue that his tactics at club level rarely climbed to heights of sophistication.

His hunger for the job – he has taken a pay cut from Sunderland to work with England – is a welcome contrast to the mercenary regime of one of his predecessors, Fabio Capello. But will it be the same for Italy and Spain with their low-profile choices? Will hunger and pride trump a huge reputation? We will see.

All three of these major footballing nations can surely take heart from the experience of Germany in the past decade with head coach Joachim Low.

He was far from a big name when he started, having worked at clubs in Turkey and Austria before becoming such a triumphant success with *Die Mannschaft*. WS

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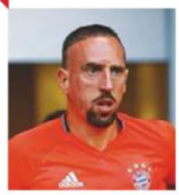


"Football is a simple game. Sometimes Guardiola spoke too much"

Bayern Munich star Franck Ribery earns a rebuke from club chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge for his critique of former coach Pep Guardiola

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

Ukraine boss... Andriy Shevchenko

EUROPE

ANDRIY SHEVCHENKO, who retired in 2012 as his country's all-time leading goalscorer, was appointed coach of Ukraine on a two-year contract. He will be assisted by ex-Italy defender **MAURO TASSOTTI** and former Dynamo Kiev boss **RAUL RIANCHO**.

KAREL JAROLIM will take over as Czech Republic coach on August 25 after leading Mlada Boleslav in their Europa League qualifying campaign.

STEVE WALSH was named Everton's director of football, having previously been employed by last season's Premier League champions Leicester City.

Former Italy keeper **WALTER ZENGA** was appointed manager of English second-tier side Wolverhampton Wanderers, following their takeover by Chinese conglomerate Fosun International.

Return...Mano Menezes is back at Cruzeiro

Former Holland striker **PATRICK KLUIVERT** was made director of football by Paris Saint-Germain.

Ex-Celtic boss **RONNY DEILA** will take charge of Valerenga in his Norwegian homeland in January.

SOUTH AMERICA

Former Brazil boss **MANO MENEZES** returned to take charge of Cruzeiro, seven months after leaving the club, and replaced Paulo Bento.

CONCACAF

JASON KREIS replaced Adrian Heath as boss of Orlando City in MLS. Seattle Sounders signed Uruguay international **NICOLAS LODEIRO** from Boca Juniors.

AFRICA

SALISU YUSUF, who was caretaker for friendly wins against Mali and Luxembourg in May, was named permanent coach of Nigeria.

Guinea appointed caretaker **MOHAMED BANGOURA** on a permanent basis.

ASIA

Having guided Ecuador's Independiente del Valle to the Libertadores Cup Final, **PABLO REPETTO** was appointed coach of UAE side Baniyas.

Former Australia international **DARREN STEWART** was named coach of Maldives national side.

Spanish swap...Kevin Gameiro moved from Sevilla

Gameiro joins Atletico

French striker **KEVIN GAMEIRO** joined Atletico Madrid on a four-year deal from Europa League winners Sevilla for an initial fee of €32.

Meanwhile, Atletico forward **LUCIANO VIETTO** went in the other direction, joining Sevilla on a season-long loan.

OUT

Gone...Sigi Schmid

EUROPE

MATTHIAS SAMMER, who had not worked since April after a health scare, quit as Bayern Munich sporting director.

After 134 caps, over a 20-year period, Republic of Ireland keeper **SHAY GIVEN**, 40, retired from international football.

Scottish boss **BILLY MCKINLAY** left Norwegian side Stabaek after they were knocked out of the Europa League by Connah's Quay Nomads of Wales.

CONCACAF

Seattle Sounders parted company with **SIGI SCHMID**, their only coach during eight years in MLS.

AFRICA

South Sudan's interim coach **LEO ADRAA** quit over non-payment of his salary.

Tunisian-born coach **NIZAR KHANFIR** quit APR after leading the club to the Rwandan league title.

ASIA

JAVAD NEKOUNAM, who is Iran's most-capped international with 151 appearances and played for Qatari side Al Arabi last season, announced his retirement. **KIM BYUNG-JI**, who kept goal 61 times for South Korea, also retired.

Schweinsteiger quits

Over...Bastian Schweinsteiger

BASTIAN SCHWEINSTEIGER announced his retirement from international duty after 120 caps for Germany. The 31-year-old midfielder made his debut in June 2004 and was a World Cup winner in 2014.

"In Slovenia, we would have inducted Mourinho [right] and asked for the highest penalty – three years in prison"

FifPro member Dejan Stefanovic takes the Manchester United manager to task for making Bastian Schweinsteiger train with the reserves

CFU

Derrick stays as Caribbean president despite concerns over missing cash

Gordon Derrick held on to his position as president of the Caribbean Football Union after a bitter election campaign but takes on a body in "dire financial straits".

The Antiguan beat his only challenger, David John-Williams from Trinidad & Tobago, by 18 votes to 12 in the election in Miami on July 23. A third challenger, Hillaren Frederick from the US Virgin Islands, withdrew beforehand after a feared intervention to Derrick's candidacy from CONCACAF or FIFA failed to materialise.

Canada's Victor Montagliani was elected CONCACAF president in May 2016, but Derrick was unable to run after falling foul of a FIFA ethics check. He was ruled out after his earlier censure for the 2011 Bin Hammam bribery scandal and a notorious Antiguan FIFA Goal project, which has swallowed $1.3million in FIFA money since 2000 without being built.

Derrick, who is appealing against this ruling to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, will be CFU president until 2020 but he takes on a body with liabilities of $1.2m according to a confidential CONCACAF audit of the CFU's affairs.

The audit was carried out after the CFU told CONCACAF in December 2015 and January 2016 that it was unable to make what the confederation describes as a "timely repayment" of a $230,000 loan.

CONCACAF responded with the audit, which claimed payments of $45,000 a month, to support the CFU's administrative and overhead expenses, were being made into a different account set up in Antigua & Barbuda on November 10 2015.

CONCACAF suspended the monthly CFU subvention – or grant – and began paying staff directly. On March 10, CONCACAF acting general-secretary Ted Howard wrote to Derrick, insisting any documentation relating to grants be sent by May 2016 to a New York law firm. Howard specifically insisted documentation relating to CONCACAF grants was not destroyed and threatened unspecified "sanctions" for non-compliance.

On May 31, Derrick and CFU general-secretary Neil Cochrane met CONCACAF representatives in Miami, but had only provided "some of the documentation" according to a June 14 letter. Howard described the CFU's current financial situation as "grave" after producing a financial review that posed a number of serious questions.

CONCACAF asked CFU to identify "miscellaneous payables" of $247,514 and queried "bonus payments"

CONCACAF asked the CFU to identify "miscellaneous payables" of $247,514 and queried unidentified "bonus payments". It also wanted details on expenses of $317,500 on the CFU Club Championship, $295,424 for the Men's Caribbean Cup, and $250,000 for TV rights payments.

In this review, CONCACAF asked for details on the "timing of the $1.2m of Deferred Liability", for audited financial statements for the last two fiscal years and details of an "unplanned" cost of $750,000 for a CFU women's tournament.

On June 28, CFU vice-president Cheney Joseph sent an email to Cochrane and Derrick saying: "It has been brought to my attention that the CFU is...indebted to the government of Jamaica some $80,000 on taxes."

According to Derrick, a second account was opened because the previous CFU account was held in the Cayman Islands, home to disgraced ex-CONCACAF president Jeffrey Webb.

In the CFU elections, the Grenadian Joseph held onto his first vice-president's position, while Rignaal Francisca (Curacao) and Lyndon Cooper (St Lucia) continue as second and third vice-president. Frederick failed in his bid for the role of fourth vice-president, which was won by Richard Dijkhoff of Aruba.

Steve Menary

Questions...CONCACAF general-secretary Philippe Moggio (left) and Gordon Derrick

Re-elected...CFU president Derrick

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Allardyce is uninspiring, but be thankful it wasn't Wenger

Well, at least it's not Wenger, so perhaps we should be grateful for small mercies. The Big Three, the Three Stooges, or whatever you may care to call David Gill, Dan Ashworth and Martin Glenn, reportedly had Arsene Wenger top of their list to be the next England manager.

True, Wenger, early in his distinguished managerial career, when still in France, was offered the role of manager of the French international team, but turned it down. During his many years at Arsenal, there have certainly been protracted periods when his methods inspired the team to success and when becoming England's manager would have made substantial sense. But surely not now.

Arsenal haven't won the Premier League for years, haven't made an impact on the European Champions Cup for longer still, and have only two somewhat meagre FA Cups to their recent name. And though they finished runners-up to Leicester City in last season's Premier League, they were a long 10 points behind.

Wenger two seasons ago was surely lucky to keep his job, but keep it he did, since the owner – usually an absentee – is the American billionaire Stan Kroenke, who simply seems to let Wenger get on with it. Of late, Arsenal's often pretty football has flattered to deceive and the defence – so formidably resilient in the times of Tony Adams, Martin Keown and Steve Bould – has seemed anything but watertight.

I hope the likeable Sam Allardyce does well, and he can hardly do worse than Roy Hodgson so disappointingly did in France, but for me he is an unexciting choice. He blows his own trumpet loud and well, once announcing that he should really have been managing Internazionale or Real Madrid. But in the words of an old song, "Nobody asked you Sir, she said."

The fact is, for all his reportedly innovative methods, his addiction to so-called sports science well before it became so fashionable, he has never managed major clubs. Newcastle United, when he briefly and unhappily sojourned there, was nowhere near the power it once had been.

Choice...Arsene Wenger (left) and Sam Allardyce

What seems plain enough is that Allardyce will not buy into the new orthodoxy proposed by the FA's technical director, even though Ashworth has publicly stated that he and Allardyce are singing from the same song sheet and seeking possession football at every England level. Howard Wilkinson, once an England manager himself, has publicly doubted that this would happen. Should it, anyway?

The tactical idea is not as maligned as the long-ball nonsense purveyed some years back by Charles Hughes, but such orthodoxies are hardly to be encouraged. Allardyce, meanwhile, insists that he isn't a long-ball man, but at West Ham United, once under Ron Greenwood the high temple of elaborate football, his direct methods alienated the fans.

Two out of three... Martin Glenn (left) and Dan Ashworth

It is good to see Allardyce enlisting Sammy Lee as his number two. I have long known, much liked and admired Lee, not least in his playing days with Liverpool. For years, when one went up to Anfield, one was hearing about the high promise of young Lee, then coming up fast through the junior teams. Yet though he would in due course establish himself as an international and a regular first-team player, I always thought that he'd had to become less dominating and an almost deferential player.

About his talents there was never any doubt. Never, perhaps, a dominant figure either on or off the field, his days as a club manager were uneasy, but he surely had much to give and looks a very sound appointment.

Impressive...Argentina striker Ermindo Ortega

Memories of Argentina's 'animals'

The 50th anniversary of England's World Cup victory evokes so many memories, not least of that notorious quarter-final against the Argentinians.

After it was dramatically and even abysmally over, an incensed Alf Ramsey came up to give a press conference, which I attended, to say that he hoped that in the semi-finals, England would meet a team which wanted to play football, and not – the inflammatory words – act as animals.

Those words inflamed the whole of Latin American football and would have a baleful sequel when it came to the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. What wasn't, inevitably, known at the time was that down below, the Argentinian players had been urinating against the wall of the dressing-room corridor and banging menacingly on the door of the England dressing room.

Yet had not the towering and influential Argentina captain Antonio Rattin got himself so gratuitously sent off by the little German referee, Rudolf Kreitlein, who knows what might have happened?

Kreitlein said afterwards that he had expelled Rattin "for the look on his face", but in fact Rattin had been dicing with death from early on, looming in protest over the referee and following him about the field.

Yet even against a 10-man opposition, England struggled to make chances, and before they at last managed to score the agile Argentina goalkeeper, Antonio Roma, had made only one save.

The ultimate villain of the piece was probably the bellicose anti-English manager Juan Carlos Lorenzo, who had most likely been behind the policy of petty fouls with which Argentina littered the game from the first.

In pure footballing terms, Argentina were arguably the superior side.

Their two strikers, Ermindo Onega and Luis Artime, were perhaps the best in the tournament. And England struggled laboriously to break down a resolute if ruthless defence, succeeding at last through the tried and true West Ham pair as Martin Peters sent a perfect swinging cross in from the left and Geoff Hurst rose high at the near post to head a magnificent goal.

> Even against 10-man opposition, England struggled to make chances

England didn't really hit their stride until the semi-final when, with Bobby Charlton, at his best as a deep-lying centre-forward, the expert scorer of both England goals, Portugal were defeated. It was a game in which the ever-combative Nobby Stiles marked the dynamic Eusebio out of the game. Having survived an attempt by FA officials to have him dropped after a dreadful foul on France's Jacques Simon, Ramsey declared that if Stiles went then he would go too. Stiles stayed.

Play it another time, Sam

Sam Allardyce was wise to cancel a projected September friendly against Croatia three days before England are due to play Slovakia in a World Cup qualifier in Bratislava. Surely it would have been a risk to play that friendly and subject his preferred team to the chance of injury.

Expectation...Ross Barkley (above)

Bright Barkley's disappearing act

Will the new season see a revival in the fortunes of Ross Barkley? One certainly hopes so. Barkley, who for some years has looked like one of the brightest young midfielders in the Premier League, had a dismal lapse of form last season when so much had been expected of him by club and country.

True, Roy Hodgson had quite often damned him with faint praise, lauding his attacking qualities but asserting that he too often left gaps with his forays, losing the ball. In the event, given his mysterious loss of form, it was surprising that Hodgson should take him to France at all. But take him he did, then never used him in any of England's games, not even as a substitute.

Given Barkley's palpable loss of form, it would surely have made a great deal more sense to have chosen Leicester's Danny Drinkwater, whose own form had been apparent all season and who had looked resourceful enough when he did get a game at Wembley.

Gill's costly error

David Gill, a senior figure both in FIFA and UEFA, one of the Three Wise Men, and interim FA chairman, surely blotted his copy book when he asked for FA Cup replays to be abolished from the third round onwards.

This appalled the lesser clubs, so many of whom rely on the money they can make out of FA Cup replays. Too late for comfort, Gill declared that this was merely his personal opinion but given his senior status, the damage had been done.

Replay...Exeter City (right) at Liverpool last year

Read Brian Glanville's exclusive online column at worldsoccer.com

eye witness

Tom Kundert reports from Lisbon

PORTUGAL

Champions' homecoming

Could victory at Euro 2016 signal the start of something special for Portugal?

For the second time in less than 24 hours, Ederzito Antonio Macedo Lopes – better known simply as Eder – did not pass up an invitation to be the main protagonist at an historic event.

The previous evening he had made the best possible use of a Joao Moutinho pass in extra-time against France to score the winning goal in the Euro 2016 Final at Stade de France.

Now, next to the fountain atop the vast sweeping lawn of the Alameda Dom Afonso Henriques, not a blade of grass of which was visible for the expanse of heaving humanity on it, the hero of the hour again elicited riotous cheers when he bellowed into the microphone: "Today is a f****** national holiday!"

Triumphant...the victory parade in Lisbon

Amid extraordinary scenes in Lisbon on July 11, Portugal – a football-crazed country who are so often the nearly men – had reached its zenith in the sport, and the population was savouring every second of it.

Neither sweltering temperatures nor hangovers from the previous night's ecstatic celebrations could dissuade the residents of Lisbon from pouring onto the streets. Two open-top buses carrying the European Championship-winning heroes slowly snaked along the avenues of the Portuguese capital that were jammed with flag-waving, gleeful and grateful revellers, all the way from the airport to the heart of the city.

Having reached six semi-finals and one Final in World Cups and European Championships prior to this summer's tournament, but always coming up short when it most mattered, it was common to hear Portuguese fans express their belief that they would never get to see the *Selecao* lift silverware. It was a sentiment even more deeply entrenched after the heartbreak of losing the Euro 2004 Final on home soil to Greece.

The repeated mantra of national coach Fernando Santos that "it's going to be extremely difficult for anybody to beat us" perfectly summed up the ideological shift from beautiful football to winning football. But after Santos and his men broke the spell – and for that reason alone – not a word of criticism was to be found in the Portuguese media regarding the way they did it.

The workmanlike Jose Fonte, Adrien Silva and William Carvalho epitomised a team that had gone one step further than Luis Figo, Rui Costa and Deco in 2004. As Nuno Madueira, one of Portugal's foremost football journalists and director of the Maisfutebol website put it: "Winning a first title is a bit like losing one's virginity. It's too important to expect it to be perfect."

> "Winning a first title is a bit like losing one's virginity. It's too important to expect it to be perfect"
>
> **Nuno Madueira, director of the Maisfutebol website**

But it would not have been achievable

without the players buying into the functional football philosophy, and Santos deserves huge credit for fostering what Moutinho called "an enormous spirit of unity among the squad".

France goalkeeper Hugo Lloris conceded it was a vital factor in Portugal's triumph, saying after the Final: "Portugal had amazing mental strength and spirit.

"Winning three times after extra-time takes something special inside."

As if to exemplify the fact, it's difficult to pick out any one player as Portugal's outstanding performer in France. Santos used all 20 of his outfield players, and practically all of them played a significant

Champion...Cristiano Ronaldo with state president, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa

Reception...at Belem Palace, the official residence of the country's president, close to the Tagus River

Honour...the squad meet the Portuguese president

role at one point or another.

Nevertheless, the following five are deserving of special mention:

• Nani: Portugal's most criticised player over the past few years, the former Sporting and Manchester United winger was played as a striker rather than out wide at the tournament and he was rejuvenated. Nobody doubted his talent, but his decision-making often lets him down. Playing centrally, the 29-year-old had no time to make the wrong choice. His more instinctive play translated into three goals and one assist, and he was a constant source of danger. He also got through a tremendous amount of defensive work, especially in the Final.

• Raphael Guerreiro: Like Nani, he was rewarded for a good showing at the finals with a lucrative move – Nani to Valencia, Guerreiro to Borussia Dortmund – and the left-back was magnificent throughout the tournament, defending diligently and attacking with real verve.

• Pepe: After a shaky start in the group stage, he proved that he is one of the world's best centre-backs. The Real Madrid defender put in monstrous performances in the knockout stage and it is no exaggeration to say Portugal probably would not have been champions without him in the side.

Colourful...the team plane is welcomed home on arrival at Lisbon Airport

• Rui Patricio: The goalkeeper was near faultless in all seven matches and in the Final showed the world what a brilliant shot-stopper he is. Often criticised in the past for the way he deals with crosses, he commanded his penalty area with consummate authority.

• Renato Sanches: The new Bayern Munich purchase lived up to his "teenage sensation" tag, bringing boundless energy and strength to the side, and was especially effective when appearing from the bench. He justly won the Young Player of the Tournament award.

While not at his best for much of Euro 2016, Cristiano Ronaldo produced a one-man show to save his side against Hungary. And while Santos may have been the master strategist, Ronaldo came to the fore as a true leader of men – not something he is often lauded for. Forced to contribute in a different way in the decisive match, the captain answered the call – and then some.

Devastated at failing to shake off a knee

Ecstatic...fans line the streets of Lisbon

New deal for winning coach Santos

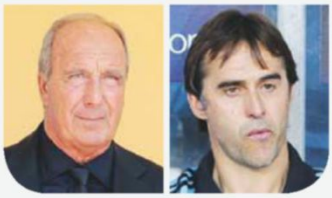
After the Euros, Fernando Santos signed a new four-year contract as Portugal coach and was asked if he feared failing to live up to heightened expectations: "Fear?" he said. "None at all, or I wouldn't be here. Besides, I have four dogs."

Having replaced Paulo Bento early in the qualifying campaign, the 61-year-old former Greece boss is now contracted to the *Selecao* until 2020.

Elsewhere, other Euro 2016 coaches were less fortunate. Belgium's Marc Wilmots was fired after four years in charge following his team's failure to live up to expectations. He was replaced in August by 43-year-old Spanish coach Roberto Martinez, who had been sacked in May by Premier League side Everton.

Spain appointed Julen Lopetegui to replace Vicente Del Bosque, who stepped down, after eight years in charge, following the round-of-16 defeat to Italy. Former under-21 coach Lopetegui had been out of work since being fired by Porto in January.

Meanwhile, Italy confirmed Giampiero Ventura as the successor to Antonio Conte and Sam Allardyce was England's choice to replace Roy Hodgson.



New faces..Ventura (left) and Lopetegui

injury sustained after Dimitri Payet's heavy challenge, he left the pitch early in the Final in tears, but it did not take long for him to pull himself – and the team – together. Cedric Soares would later explain how Ronaldo gave a stirring half-time speech to the players in the changing room, and Ronaldo was a sight to behold thereafter, hobbling on the touchline, cajoling every last ounce of effort from his team-mates as an impromptu assistant coach, once and for all dispelling the notion that he is only interested in personal glory.

Leader...Cristiano Ronaldo (right)

Although there was optimism surrounding the national team before the tournament began, there was little real conviction that Ronaldo and co would go and win it.

That enthusiasm was based on a quantity of gifted players in the 18-24 age group, with a glut of exceptional talents making a name for themselves at home and abroad.

Now, with a first trophy in the cabinet, some are going so far as to say Portugal can emulate Spain, who after making the breakthrough by winning Euro 2008 went on to dominate international football for six years.

It may be a little fanciful to expect so much, but when one remembers that players of the calibre of Bernardo Silva and Ruben Neves did not even make the Euro 2016 squad, and with the national team continually thriving at youth levels, it is not unreasonable to expect the *Selecao* to be at the business end of tournaments for the foreseeable future. WS

Tim Vickery reports

COLOMBIA

Nacional win Cup in style

Colombians win their second Libertadores title after beating Independiente del Valle

Joy...Atletico Nacional lift the Libertadores Cup

Ten wins, three draws and just a single defeat; Atletico Nacional's triumphant Libertadores campaign reads like one of the best in the history of the competition – and some of the Colombian team's football was as impressive as the statistics.

Reinaldo Rueda's men played in the tradition of their 1989 predecessors who, under coach Francisco Maturana, helped put Colombian football on the map with a patient and attractive passing game.

Changes of rhythm in possession – slow build-ups suddenly culminating in quick combinations – came together for Rueda's side with flashes of individual talent. And though the line-up had to be reconstructed both immediately before and during the competition, the team retained a collective identity which proved too strong for their opponents in the Final: the fairy-tale team from Ecuador, Independiente del Valle.

Emerging from their country's third division less than a decade ago, tiny Independiente have come a long way in a short time with a strong identity of their own. The club, from the outskirts of Quito, specialise in youth development and the fact that they lack a mass following perhaps makes it easier for them to achieve continuity, with Uruguayan coach Pablo Repetto in charge for four years before stepping down after the Final.

> Reinaldo Rueda's men played in the tradition of their 1989 predecessors, who put Colombian football on the map

Champions... celebrating in Medellin

His side had much in common with the current Ecuador national team, with a gameplan based on swift transitions to quick and skilful wingers. Throughout the knockout rounds they built up a narrow lead in the home leg – first in their ramshackle little stadium and then in the capital – and protected it in the away leg with a mixture of valiant defence and counter-thrusts.

In the course of their extraordinary campaign, Independiente emerged victorious from some of the most fearsome venues in South American football – but they were unable to make an impression on Atletico Nacional.

The Colombians should have killed off the Final in the first leg in Quito. They took a first-half lead when Macnelly Torres

played a typically well disguised pass, feinting to use the movement to his right but instead cutting back left to find Orlando Berrio on the edge of the area. Berrio used his strength to hold off the Independiente centre-backs and made enough space on his right foot to whip a shot back past the keeper.

There were chances for a second – notably when Marlos Moreno was just over with a snap shot from range – but increasingly Nacional were happy to take the sting out of the game. However, they were punished for their lack of ambition when, out of the blue, Independiente found a late equaliser. Junior Sornoza's free-kick from deep was well struck, and with keeper Franco Armani in no-man's land, centre-back Arturo Mina forced home at the second attempt.

Delight...it is 12 years since a Colombian side last won the trophy

In Medellin a week later, though, it did not take Nacional long to get back in the lead. Centre-forward Miguel Borja wasted a chance in the first 10 seconds, but would not be denied for long. Torres dinked a free-kick into that corridor of uncertainty, Mina was panicked into turning the ball against his own post and from the rebound Borja powered in a shot on the swivel.

In almost complete control, Nacional dominated possession and spurned further chances to increase their lead. But

Battling... Davinson Sanchez (in green)

this time they did not pay the price.

At the interval, Independiente replaced Sornoza with Johnny Uchuari, a more dynamic little playmaker, and he was perhaps unlucky not to have been awarded a penalty soon after the restart. But it was a rare glimpse of threat from the Ecuadorians. Nacional ran down the clock with few problems, and while Repetto paid tribute to the achievements of his men, he graciously conceded that the better team had won.

SEMI-FINALS

For the first time in 25 years, the Libertadores Final did not feature a team from either Argentina or Brazil. The previous sides to break the monopoly of the big two had been from Ecuador (LDU in 2008) and Colombia (Once Caldas four years earlier). In this year's semis, the representatives from these two countries won both home and away against the giants from the south.

Scorer... Miguel Borja (above left)

Ineffective...Carlos Tevez

Both were memorable triumphs. Atletico Nacional were the underdogs when they went into their clash with Sao Paulo. The six-week break between the quarter- and semi-finals should surely have benefited the Brazilians, who had been in regular competitive action while the Colombian league had paused. Moreover, Nacional had lost two key players, and had to incorporate new centre-forward Borja into the team without a dress rehearsal.

In the event, Borja scored all of the team's goals in their 4-1 aggregate win. Sao Paulo had complaints against the refereeing – the sending off of centre-back Maicon in the first leg was a little harsh, and Hudson may have been denied a penalty in the second. But Nacional's superiority was beyond dispute.

They passed rings round the Brazilians, striking late to win 2-0 in Brazil, and then squandering a succession of chances but still winning the second 2-1. It meant that, despite a huge financial advantage over

Off...Maicon (above left)

their continental rivals, there was no Brazilian team in the final for the third consecutive year.

The previous two campaigns had ended with Argentinian victories. And Boca Juniors were overwhelming favourites to eliminate Independiente del Valle and make it through to yet another Final. The Buenos Aires giants were the last unbeaten team in the competition – but, amazingly, they went down home and away to the humble Ecuadorians.

Pablo Perez gave Boca an early lead in Quito. But Independiente turned the screw in the second half, and won the game with goals from their most impressive players. Bryan Cabezas, carrying the fight down the left wing, scored the equaliser, and centre-forward Jose Angulo made it 2-1 with a fine solo strike. The worrying aspect for Boca was the way their lack of defensive pace had been exposed.

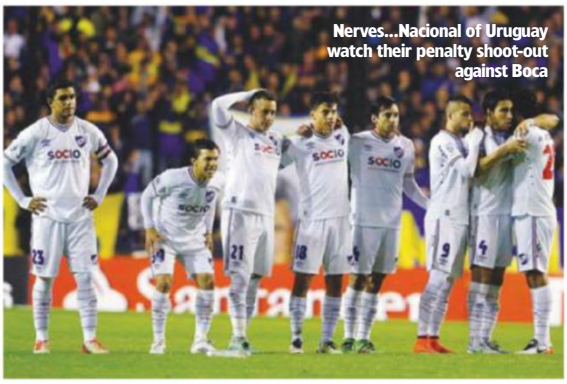
Even so, in their mythical Bombonera stadium it was generally assumed that Boca would prevail, especially when early pressure led to a Cristian Pavon goal. But some slack marking at a corner allowed Luis Caicedo to equalise. And in the first few minutes of the second half, the cracks in the Boca defence widened.

A kick out from the keeper and two flick ons put Cabezas behind the line to score again, and then Boca keeper Agustin Orion got himself in a mess outside his area, underhitting a pass and allowing right winger Julio Angulo to run the ball into an unguarded net.

Boca were stunned, with Carlos Tevez ineffective. He did not even step up when Boca won a penalty. Nico Lodeiro's weak left footed shot was comfortably saved – and Pavon's second goal in stoppage time was mere consolation.

SECOND ROUND AND QUARTER- FINALS

All the teams from Bolivia, Chile and Peru had been knocked out in the group phase. Venezuela and Paraguay were left without representation after the second round, which also whittled down the contingent from Brazil and Argentina. The big two had 9 of the last 16 teams – five of them failed to make it through to the quarter-finals.



Nerves...Nacional of Uruguay watch their penalty shoot-out against Boca

The most stunning elimination was that of reigning champions River Plate, beaten 2-1 on aggregate by Independiente del Valle after they had given evidence of their resilience by drawing 0-0 away to Colo Colo of Chile to get out of the group phase.

They had to dig deep once more in the quarter-finals against Pumas of Mexico. Away from home in the second leg they were down to 10 men when they needed a goal to force penalties. Sornoza scored from a free kick, and they came flawlessly through the shoot-out.

All the quarter-finals were tight. In the all-Brazilian affair, Sao Paulo beat Atletico Mineiro on away goals. Boca and Nacional of Uruguay also went to penalties – with the Uruguayans in the driving seat until they missed three in a row.

And it was in the quarter-finals that the eventual champions had their big scare. Rueda picked a strange team, starting with three centre-backs as Atletico Nacional went down 1-0 away to Rosario Central of Argentina, their only defeat of the campaign. An early – perhaps harsh – penalty scored by Central's Marco Ruben in Medellin then left Nacional needing to score three times.

Two came either side of half time, but Central tightened up in midfield. In fact, they went too far.

Eduardo Coudet's team had played some splendid football in the competition, but now they betrayed their identity, overdoing the time wasting and paying the price when Orlando Berrio – introduced soon after the half hour with Nacional desperately seeking goals – swept home the decisive strike in the sixth minute of stoppage time. WS

Bryan Kay reports

COSTA RICA

Novice claims a third title

American owner helps Herediano to be crowned champions once again

A "gringo" who admits he knew next to nothing about the game before taking over one of Costa Rica's most cherished teams, David Patey is the most unlikely of football club owners. Yet the 40-year-old American has transformed the fortunes of provincial side Herediano, both on and off the pitch, and overseen a remarkable turnaround that ended with victory in the Final of the Campeonato de Verano (summer championship) and a third league title of his stewardship.

Based in the city of Heredia – which is a short drive northwest of the capital San Jose, where the country's most successful club, Deportivo Saprissa, are based – Herediano are ultimately owned by a local sports association. However, after winning their first title for 20 years in 2012, they were plunged into severe financial straits when a franchise-like management agreement with an outside party went sour. And that was when Patey stepped in to steady the ship.

"The previous owner of the club had had some other business deals where I had met him, and there was a group of Herediano fans who knew that I was close to the guy and maybe I could help with the situation," explains Patey

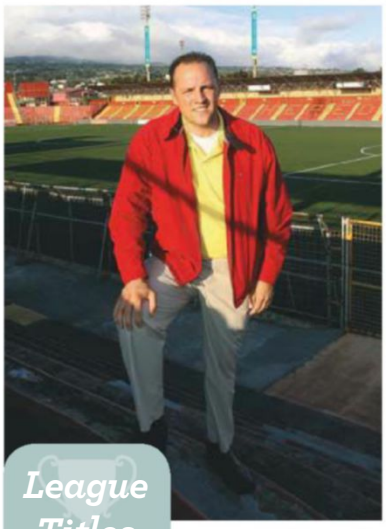
"What was the situation? The club was having financial trouble. There was an argument, or a legal situation, between the previous owner and the association itself. And they called me on the phone and said, 'Hey, can you help us with something?'

"They said, 'You know there's a situation we have to deal with, with the club, and we want to know if you can help us mitigate the situation and see if we can find a resolution for the benefit of the fans. This is our love, this is our passion and we think you can help us.'

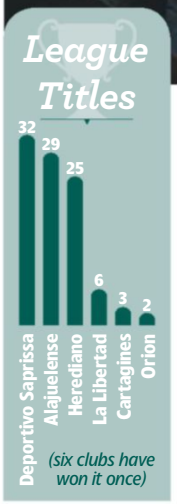
"A week later, I was in a press conference being announced as the new president of the club."

Patey and his consortium – consisting of his brothers Mike and Mark, Aquil Ali from Canada and Costan Rican Orlando Moreira – have been a shining beacon of hope in an often unforgiving landscape of dodgy club owners in the local game.

Yet, Patey, a nominal basketball fan from Utah, was never much of a sports fan before getting involved with Herediano. By



Saviour...David Patey (left)



"They said: 'This is our love, this is our passion and we think you can help us.' A week later, I was in a press conference being announced as the new president of the club"

David Patey

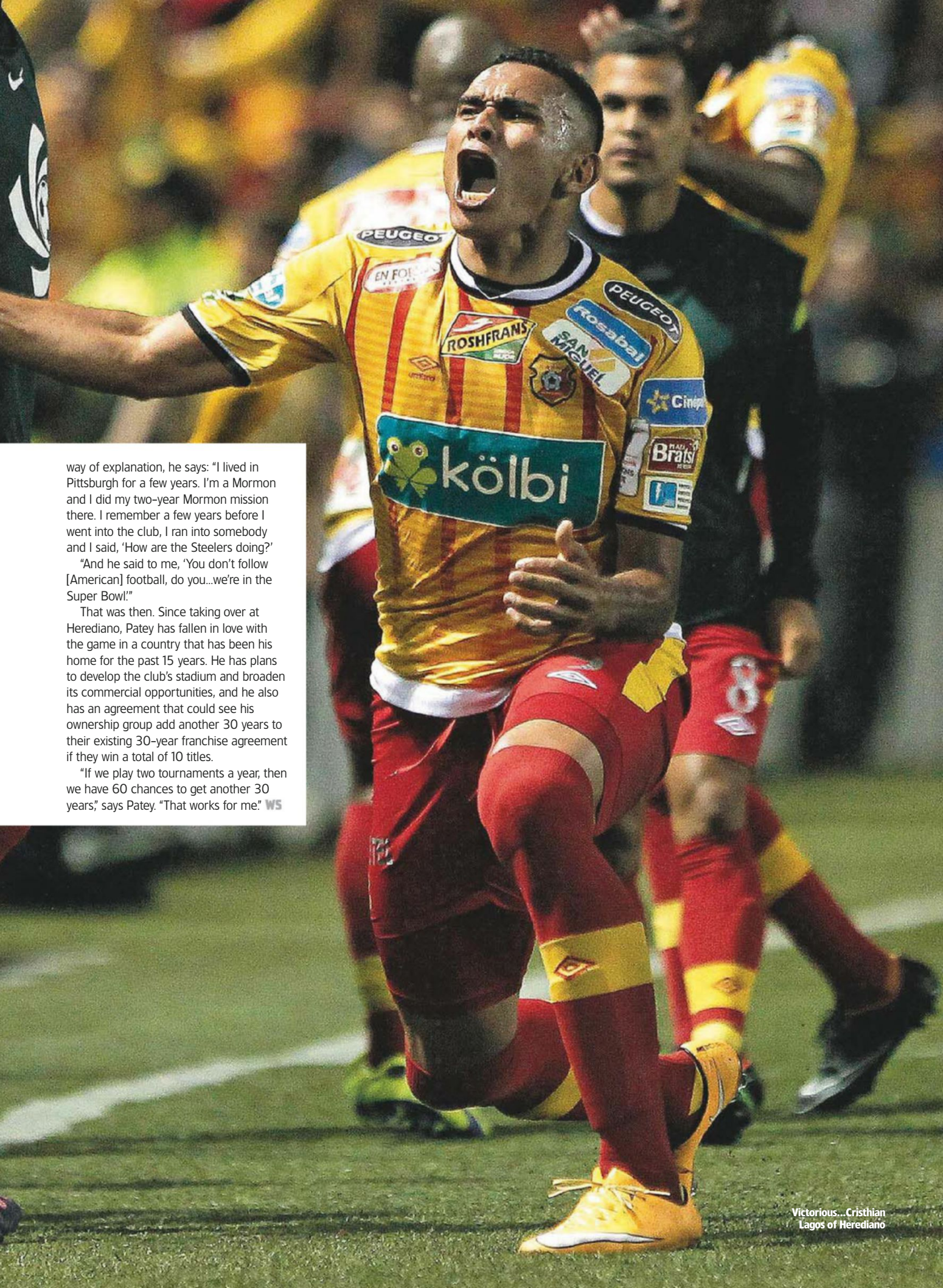
Passionate...Herediano supporters

way of explanation, he says: "I lived in Pittsburgh for a few years. I'm a Mormon and I did my two-year Mormon mission there. I remember a few years before I went into the club, I ran into somebody and I said, 'How are the Steelers doing?'

"And he said to me, 'You don't follow [American] football, do you...we're in the Super Bowl!'"

That was then. Since taking over at Herediano, Patey has fallen in love with the game in a country that has been his home for the past 15 years. He has plans to develop the club's stadium and broaden its commercial opportunities, and he also has an agreement that could see his ownership group add another 30 years to their existing 30-year franchise agreement if they win a total of 10 titles.

"If we play two tournaments a year, then we have 60 chances to get another 30 years," says Patey. "That works for me." WS



Victorious...Cristhian Lagos of Herediano

Steve Menary reports

MAURITIUS

A false start

New dawn did little for domestic game

Given the unwanted historical baggage that weighs football down in some countries, starting from scratch can often seem appealing. In Mauritius, tragedy made doing just that unavoidable, but the impact has been ruinous.

A widely diverse population of 1.3million reflects a history of slavery on the Indian Ocean Island, which was first inhabited by the Dutch and then colonised by France and Britain before independence in 1968.

Ethnic and religious divisions intersect Mauritian life at all levels, and none more so than football, which rather than growing out of geographic attachments developed through communal ties.

The Mauritius Football Association (MFA) was formed in 1952 and early teams included Tamil Cadets, Muslim Scouts and Fire Brigade, which drew support from the Creole community. Meanwhile, the coloured minority supported Racing Club or Hounds and white Franco-Mauritians backed Dodos.

The game was extremely popular and, as reported in the February 1964 issue of *World Soccer*, crowds of 18,000 to 20,000 were not uncommon.

Unfortunately, divisions outside football would often manifest themselves at games and trouble became commonplace.

In 1982, the government tried to put a stop to the violence by forcing the clubs to change their names. But while Tamil Cadets changed their name to Sunrise, Hindu Cadets and Muslim Scouts simply dropped their community names but retained their support.

Problems continued, and not just in domestic games. When Sunrise took on Zamalek in a 1996 African Cup of Champions Clubs tie, around 500 Scouts fans decided they would support the Egyptian visitors. Deemed unpatriotic, a riot ensued after the game.

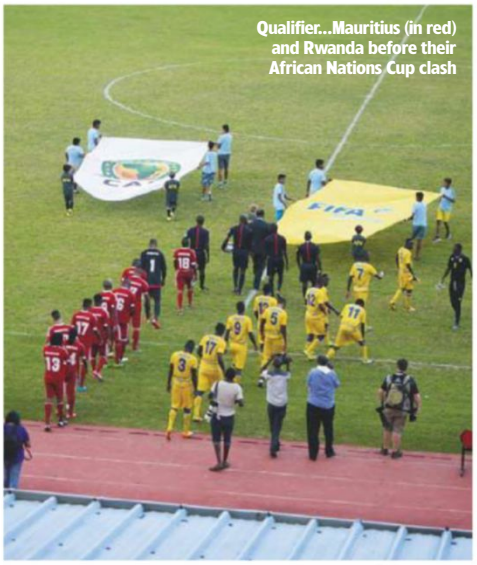
Matters reached a tragic denouement in May 1999 when reigning champions Scouts needed only a draw with Fire Brigade to retain their title. After Fire Brigade scored on 89 minutes, a Scouts equaliser was disallowed and violence spread to the capital Port Louis which resulted in a fire at the L'Amicale Casino and the death of seven people. To this day, the arsonists' motives are keenly debated. Was the fire related to football or was it started by religious zealots due to the casino's proximity to the Jummah Mosque?

After the tragedy, football was suspended for nearly two years and all the old clubs were swept away. When the game returned, teams had to represent a town or village rather than be based around ethnicity or religion. But without the traditional rivalries among fans there was a fall in interest and support, and the domestic game never regained its purchase on or off the pitch.

On the international stage, Club M – as the national side are known – have only once qualified for the finals of the African Nations Cup, losing all three games in Egypt in 1974. They have, however, won the Indian Ocean Games title twice, the last of which was in 2003, when 15 of their 20-man squad were brought up on the island but played professionally abroad.

When Club M took on Rwanda in March this year, the only overseas-based players in coach Joe Tshupula's squad were Kevin Bru, a midfielder with English second-tier side Ipswich Town, and striker Gary Noel, who was playing in the Austrian third division with First Vienna but has since joined German side Lubeck.

While the lack of overseas-based



Qualifier...Mauritius (in red) and Rwanda before their African Nations Cup clash

Team spirit...(left to right, black T-shirts only) Mauritius players Adel Langue, Gary Noel, Kevin Bru, Colin Bell, Kevin Perticot and Andy Sophie

> "The local football is not very good at the moment, but they are trying to make things better. In five or 10 years, they will have some good players"
>
> **Kevin Bru, Ipswich Town and Mauritius midfielder**

players illustrates the national team's loss of status, the 1-0 win over a team ranked 87 places higher could prove to be a major turning point.

As the game was taking place, Mauritian sports minister Yogida Sawmynaden touched down at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport and, on being told that Club M were about to win, he dashed straight to Stade Anjalay for the post-match celebrations.

The following week, the government agreed to fund a raft of MFA development plans, including an initiative to revitalise youth development.

"My predecessors didn't have a plan for youth football," says MFA president Samir Sobha. "Youth football didn't have any importance for them."

Triumphant...celebrating Francis Rasolofonirina's winner against Rwanda

Since becoming president in 2014, Sobha has been pushing plans for youth academies at under-13, under-15 and under-17 levels. He has also undertaken a policy of seeking out more foreign players who are eligible for the national team, such as central defender Lindsay Rose of Lorient and Rennes striker Wesley Said, who were both born in France.

"The local football is not very good at the moment, but they are trying to make things better," says international Bru, who is fully supportive of Sobha. "In five or 10

years, they will have some good players."

The euphoria of the victory over Rwanda soon dissipated after they lost 5-0 in the return leg of the African Nations Cup qualifier, but Sobha remains upbeat.

Two years ago, in a qualifier against Mauritania, just a few hundred people turned up to watch the national side. Against Rwanda, there was a crowd of 3,000 which – given that more than 10,000 were, at the same time, watching the start of the horse-racing season in Port Louis – is something of an achievement. "Little by little the crowds are improving," says Sobha.

> "Television has killed football in small countries. People got used to staying at home, and eating, drinking and watching the football on TV"
>
> **Mauritius FA president Samir Sobha**

While half a dozen Mauritians play professionally in the neighbouring French department of Reunion, all are in their 30s and will not get a call-up on Sobha's watch as the focus is firmly on youth.

Among those who played against Rwanda were 19-year-olds Kevin Perticot, a midfielder with Pamplemousses, and Cercle de Joachim defender Damian Balisson, while Balisson's midfield club-mate Adel Langue was 18. The promotion of those youngsters has come in part through turning the top flight of Mauritian football into a full-time professional league in 2014.

Wages in the Mauritian Premier Football League (MPFL) start at around £250 a month – which is equivalent to a shop workers' salary – and can reach £600 at the top end. Clubs are allowed only five foreigners, many of whom are Nigerians, while teams can have one "wild card" who is allowed to play part-time. This means that players such as national-team midfielder Colin Bell, who is a 37-year-old policeman, can avoid having to decide between a well-paid job and playing full time for Pamplemousses.

Star man... Kevin Bru

The onus now is on making football a career. However, the old divisions are emerging once more.

"I'd say 85 per cent of players now are Christians, maybe more," says Ruben Exco, president of MPFL side Chamarel. "Parents want their children to get an education, so the players you have are those that will play at a low cost and are generally the ones who stopped school."

Support...fans watch the action at Stade Anjalay in Belle Vue Maurel

Sobha wants to change all that. Backed by the MFA and with government support, the MPFL pools all incomes and distributes three million rupees (about £60,000) to each of the 10 clubs to run a 25-man squad.

The idea of government support for professional football might seem odd, but Mauritian clubs can only enter CAF club competitions with MFA or government

Mauritius Premier Football League

Cercle de Joachim Founded in 2002 by MFA president Samir Sobha. Were the last league champions before professionalism began and then won the inaugural MPFL title in 2015.

Chamarel Founded in 2010 by restaurateur Ruben Exco, they won third and second-tier titles in 2012 and 2013 and are now in their second MPFL season. Chamarel is a hamlet of only 800 people.

Curepipe Starlight Four-times national champions, between 2007 and 2013, they share the Stade George V Stadium in Plaines Wilhems District with Cercle de Joachim.

GRSE Wanderers Based on the east coast, they play at the 2,000-capacity multi-use Stade Auguste Vollaire in Flaq.

La Cure Sylvester Well-supported side from the capital who share the St Francois Xavier Stadium with Port Louis. The stadium, which opened in 2009, has the only artificial pitch in the top flight.

Threat...Mauritius on the attack against Rwanda

support as travel in Africa is expensive. Getting to Ghana for a Nations Cup qualifier last June cost the MFA two million rupees (£40,000) – which made losing 7-1 even worse.

Under operations director Deelen Sinnasamy, the MPFL is looking to the private sector for help. "If you get foreign companies that have branches here and want to sponsor a team, I don't think it's a lot of money," he explains. "We are looking for companies that can bring added value. Not just putting money on the table, but bringing expertise. It's important to have companies that are interested in the project."

All over...supporters head home after Mauritius' African Nations Cup win

Some games only attract crowds of double figures even though tickets are only 50 rupees (£1), but the league does have a sponsor in Barclays. That is bitterly ironic as the Barclays Premier League in England is widely viewed as being at least partly responsible for the lack of interest in local football as Liverpool, Manchester United, Arsenal and Manchester City all have strong Mauritian followings.

"Television has killed football in small countries," says Sobha, who cites the 1999 suspension of the game as a major factor, adding: "People got used to staying at home, and eating, drinking and watching the football on TV."

With English football beamed into the island via satellite, there is little anyone can do, but Sobha has a plan that does not involve going back to find a future for the Mauritian game.

"The only way to bring people to the stadium is the performance of the national team," says Sobha.

"The national team is the country and we promote the national team." WS

Key figures in Mauritian football

Samir Sobha
Elected MFA president in 2014 but only recognised by FIFA last year. Played for Sunrise before football was suspended, then for Curepipe Cosmos after the re-start, before founding Cercle de Joachim in 2002.

Joe Tshupula
Was coach of Royale Union Saint-Gilloise in Belgium and Motema Pembe in his native DR Congo before moving to Mauritius in 2010. After a spell at Riviere du Rempart, he took charge of Cercle de Joachim. Won the 2014 and 2015 titles before replacing Alain Happe as national coach last summer.

Deelen Sinnasamy
Background in finance before his surprise appointment, aged just 22, as MPFL director of operations in 2014.

Jonathan Bru
Played for France from under-16 to under-21 level. Now with French fourth-tier side Poissy and is Club M captain.

Kevin Bru
Represented France at under-19 level before following his older brother, Jonathan, into the Mauritian set-up in 2011. The midfielder joined Ipswich Town in 2014.

Pamplemousses
The club, whose name translates as "grapefruit", are based in Belle Vue Maurel and won three national titles between 2006 and 2012.

Port-Louis 2000
One of the best-supported sides with crowds of up to 4,000 for some games – reflecting the club's origins in defunct club Muslim Scouts. Have won five league championships.

Quatre Bornes
Based in Palma and play at the Stade Sir Guy Rozemont in Quatre Bornes, the club were promoted to the top flight for the first MPFL season in 2014-15.

Petite Riviere Noire
Based at Tamarin on the west coast, they play at Stade Germain Comarmond and won the 2014 Mauritian Cup. That secured a second CAF Confederations Cup appearance for PRN.

Riviere du Rempart
Another well-supported club. Based at Mapou but they play at the 18,000-capacity Stade Anjalay, which was refurbished in 2003 at a cost of $15million.

The age of non-possession

At Euro 2016, teams were less afraid of not having the ball, says Jonathan Wilson

It was not a good Final, but then it had not been a good tournament. So, as time slides by, what will be remembered of the 2016 European Championship?

Wales and Iceland, perhaps? Two underdog stories to warm the heart that will be used by those with a vested interest to justify the expansion to 24 teams – even though both would almost certainly have qualified for a 16-team tournament, anyway.

A weirdly awful penalty shoot-out in the quarter-finals as Germany did everything possible to shake off the stereotype of ruthless efficiency from the spot but beat Italy anyway?

A genuinely epic semi-final in Marseille in which the tournament's noisiest crowd roared France to victory over Germany.

And a lot of drab, reactive football, based on anti-possession, at which Portugal proved the most adept.

The over-riding lesson of Euro 2016, perhaps, is that it is not even the case any longer that the international game lags behind the club game. They are now so diverse that they are almost different sports, the quality of football played by the best national sides so inferior to that played by the club elite that the hand-wringing over Sam Allardyce's appointment as England manager and what it means for the long-term future of the English game seems laughably old-fashioned.

> Portugal scored only five goals in 420 minutes of knockout football – but in that period they conceded just once

The ideal for a national side is for a generation to emerge that are all versed in a similar style of football, whether because of a visionary manager who has overhauled, directly or indirectly, a nation's youth development, as has happened with Chile and Uruguay, or because they all merged from one or two clubs, something that has recently benefited both Spain and Germany.

If neither of those two things are true, then it's almost impossible for a national team to develop any kind of fluency as there isn't time to develop the necessary mutual understanding.

That's a particular problem for creative play. The principles of defending vary little from club to club – at least once an initial pressing phase is over. The back line retreats to its level, the midfield creates another line 10 or so yards in front of it and space is closed off. National defences will never be quite as slick as club defences, but at least each component knows roughly what the other components within it are trying to do.

Attacks take much longer. At club level it's become common for sides to practise gambits, to be adapted and put into practice when the situation demands. A midfielder receiving the ball under pressure, for instance, may know his centre-forward will pull deep just to the right of centre. That striker will also know the usual angle from which his winger tends to make his runs infield and so can help the ball into his path with barely a thought. Take away the weeks of practice, the session after session of drilling, and each move takes a fraction of a second longer. Add those fractions together and it represents a significant amount of time in which a defending side can reset itself. That's why there are always so many fewer goals scored in international tournaments than in club football. This Euros yielded just 2.12 goals per game as opposed to 2.70 goals per game in the Premier League last season or 2.78 in the Champions League.

That's been the case for some time, but it did feel at Euro 2016 as though international football had entered a new era. After the radical possession of Barcelona and Spain, which made the sight of one team having 70 per cent of the ball seem normal, teams have become less afraid of not having the ball. The Euros

Counter...Portugal's Ricardo Quaresma scores against Croatia

Incentive...Northern Ireland (in green) were happy with a narrow loss to Germany

Options...France defend in the semi-finals but they did offer a threat on the counter

was a tournament of radical non-possession.

Of course, teams have always sat deep and counter-attacked, and when one team is stronger than the other that is usually the most effective way for the weaker side to play. But the sight of two teams trying to let the other have the ball is something new – as was the 24-team format which, by admitting eight weaker sides, incentivised teams in the group stage to play for a draw or even, in the case of Northern Ireland against Germany, a narrow defeat.

Some indication of that idea can be seen in the fact that 49 per cent of games at the Euros featured one side having 60 per cent possession or more, as opposed to 37 per cent of games in last season's Premier League. Half of the games, in other words, were essentially attack against defence. If the defending side offers some sort of counter-thrust, as France did in that Marseille semi-final, when they had just 33 per cent of possession, that's not necessarily a problem, but too often here one team was essentially a punchbag, inertly soaking up pressure without any idea of how to land a blow in response.

PORTUGAL'S EURO-WINNING LINE-UP

Success...the team that started against France in the Final

Portugal's method – at least after the 3-3 draw against Hungary at the end of the group stage had startled Fernando Santos into action – was to protect the back four with William Carvalho (or Danilo Pereira in the semi-final when Carvalho was suspended) and three tacklers in front of him, leaving Nani and Cristiano Ronaldo up front to try to create something. Portugal scored only five goals in 420 minutes of knockout football but in that period they conceded just once. And that, in the absence of an outstanding side such as Spain, is enough to win a tournament.

That's the irony of the fulfilment of the vow a tearful 19-year-old Ronaldo made after losing the Euro 2004 Final to Greece. In order for him to help Portugal to win their first international tournament, he had to sublimate himself to the team to the extent that he wasn't even on the pitch for most of the Final.

It says much about Euro 2016 that when one of the great attackers of all time left the pitch, it proved less significant than the strength of their defence. WS

6 of the best

Libertadores stars

Tim Vickery selects the standout performers from this year's South American club competition

1 BRYAN CABEZAS

INDEPENDIENTE DEL VALLE

The fact that Independiente's left-winger was something of a disappointment in both legs of the Final could not be taken as a question of temperament, because in South American football there are few things bigger than a meeting with Boca Juniors – and here Cabezas excelled. He scored home and away as the Ecuadorians got the better of the previously unbeaten Buenos Aires giants in both legs, showcasing power, speed and skill that were too much for his opposing right-back.

Cabezas is a fine illustration of the Independiente project, as they identified his potential, groomed him for five years and will now presumably cash in on his sale.

The club's most successful graduate is Jefferson Montero, also a left-winger. And while Cabezas does not have all of the sinuous skills of the Swansea City man, he is more direct and physically imposing.

There should be plenty more to come from the young man who silenced the Bombonera stadium.

2 MIGUEL BORJA

ATLETICO NACIONAL

Colombian clubs now hold both South America's titles, after Atletico Nacional added the Libertadores to the Sudamericana Cup won by Santa Fe in December. And centre-forward Miguel Borja was involved in both.

At Santa Fe he was a substitute who made so little impression that he was considered surplus to requirements for this year's Libertadores. He therefore rejoined Cortulua, where he picked up confidence by scoring 19 goals in the apertura championship, breaking the short-tournament record which had been held by Jackson Martinez. Having played the first half of the year without a centre-forward, Nacional then drafted him in for the closing stages of the Libertadores.

There was no time for a dress rehearsal, but right from the off it was a perfect marriage: a team full of passing and movement that created chances for a quick, uncomplicated and in-form goalgetter.

In four games – the two legs of the semis and the Final – he scored five times to become his team's top scorer in the tournament.

3 Jonathan CALLERI

SAO PAULO

When a delay in securing an EU passport scuppered a move across the Atlantic, Argentinian centre-forward Calleri swapped Boca Juniors for a loan spell with Sao Paulo. There was, however, a risk involved as he was trading a consolidated partnership with Carlos Tevez for a step into the unknown, and failure to adapt would make him less attractive to European clubs.

Instead, the move was a resounding success and he responded by becoming the Brazilian side's top scorer in the 2016 Libertadores with nine goals.

Brave and bright around the penalty box, he is no technical marvel and there is little that is impressive about his combination play, but a move to West Ham looks likely; it will be interesting to see if he has enough to make a consistent impression at a higher level.

4 NICO LOPEZ

NACIONAL

Eliminated on penalties in the quarter-finals by Boca Juniors, Uruguay's Nacional produced their best performance in the Libertadores since 2009 – and might have done even better if Lopez had been fully fit.

A star of the Uruguay team that came second in the 2013 Under-20 World Cup, the striker stagnated in Italy at Roma so he returned home to Nacional, where his speed, sharpness and intelligence brought a different dimension to a counter-attacking game plan.

Left-footed Lopez was the cutting edge as his side saw off one Brazilian rival, Palmeiras, in the group phase, and then eliminated Corinthians.

Injury hampered him against Boca, but he had done enough to earn a move to Brazil's Internacional.

5 Frank FABRA

BOCA JUNIORS

On the outskirts of Medellin, the Envigado club are known for the excellence of their youth development work. And a couple of years after they sold James Rodriguez to Argentina, they unleashed another left-footer who would later be heading south, with the quick and dynamic full-back Fabra enjoying a fine first campaign with Boca.

In retrospect, it seems strange that he stayed with Envigado from his 2010 debut until 2014 – at which point his career picked up momentum with successful spells at both Deportivo Cali and Medellin, as well as international honours.

The recent Copa America semi-final against Chile perhaps underlined the point that he is not the greatest defensive left-back in the world, but with his speed and stamina, his capacity to link up with the attack has been well used by Boca.

He was perhaps the key man in the quarter-finals against Nacional of Uruguay, providing the width to get round an opposing back four that liked to remain close together.

At 25, time is maybe not on his side, but if Boca can tighten up his defending he may yet follow Rodriguez across the Atlantic.

6 Jefferson OREJUELA

INDEPENDIENTE DEL VALLE

The lanky, central midfielder was the beating heart of the Independiente del Valle story. As an emphasis on fast breaks down the flank often left them facing the risk of becoming too stretched, Orejuela kept knitting the team together with his dynamism, sensible passing and willingness to take responsibility.

Acquired by Independiente at the age of 17 in 2010, the year the club were making their debut in the Ecuadorian top tier, within two years he was featuring in the first team, just at the point when they were raising their short-term ambitions beyond mere survival.

And since they have launched challenges on both domestic and now continental titles, Orejuela has been there all the way, gradually replacing one-time captain Henry Leon and making himself an indispensable part of the side.

He has not yet forced his way into the national team yet, where he would seem capable of becoming a proficient midfield partner for Cristian Noboa. But that may now only be a matter of time after a Libertadores which has given him wider recognition, with several Brazilian clubs said to be interested in signing him.

Glenn Moore

Lyon remain the team to beat

In a new column on the women's game, Glenn Moore looks ahead to the forthcoming season across Europe

Lyon's victory in the UEFA Women's Champions League Final in May marked the end of an era at the French club, but there is unlikely to be any easing of their European power and domestic dominance. French champions 10 seasons in a row, OL bade farewell to a trio of players after their penalty shoot-out victory over Wolfsburg before swiftly announcing a series of measures that should make Gerard Precheur's side even stronger.

Of those leaving, Louisa Necib – who is often billed as the female Zinedine Zidane, due to a similar playing style and also being Marseille-born of Algerian heritage – has announced that, at 29, she would retire after the Olympics to start a family. Having married Servette's French-Algerian defender Liassine Cadamuro-Bentaiba in June she says that combining motherhood with playing would be "complicated". Meanwhile, 32-year-old Swedish striker Lotta Schelin, who scored 224 goals in 214 games for Lyon, has returned home to join Damallsvenskan leaders Rosengard and Amandine Henry, at 26 the only one of the three whose best years lie ahead, has signed for Portland Thorns in the USA.

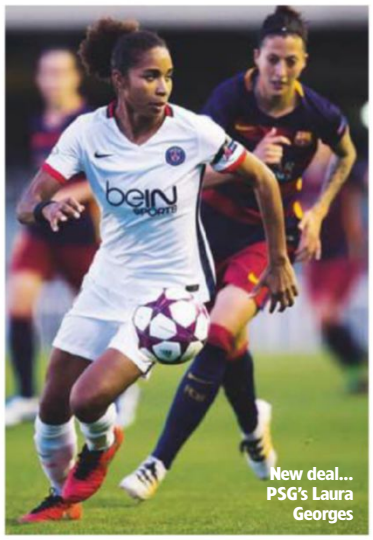
These three have been at the heart of Lyon's success, but the club is looking forwards, not backwards. President Jean-Michel Aulas even used Twitter to float the audacious idea of luring Alex Morgan from the US, but that seems unlikely given she has just moved to Orlando Pride in order to be near her husband, Servando Carrasco, who plays MLS for Orlando City.

> "It is time to give credence to women athletes"
>
> **Sandro Mencucci, Fiorentina's executive managing director**

Nevertheless, several key players, notably strikers Eugenie Le Sommer and Ada Hegerberg, have signed new contracts, and a raft of new recruits have been acquired.

The most eye-catching arrival is German midfielder Dzsenifer Marozsan, who was a Champions League winner with Frankfurt in 2015. More significant from a Division 1 Feminine perspective is the switch from Paris Saint-Germain of Kenza Dali, Kheira Hamraoui, Jessica Houara and Caroline Seger. All four featured in Lyon's shock 8-0 aggregate demolition of PSG in the Champions League semi-finals.

PSG have invested heavily in players in recent years in an attempt to crack Lyon's dominance, but without success. Though they reached the final of the Champions League in 2015 – beating Lyon on the way – their last trophy was the Coupe de France in 2010 and new coach Patrice Lair says of the departures: "I couldn't do much about it, but we have to find solutions. It's looking like a pretty big challenge. Perhaps it's a new cycle that's beginning here, especially with the new coaching staff."



New deal... PSG's Laura Georges

Three points behind Lyon last season, PSG have signed Spain's Veronica Boquete from Bayern Munich and Saint-Etienne's Sarah Palacin, but the focus appears to be on developing young players and retaining the likes of Christiane, Laura Georges and Shirley Cruz, who have signed new deals.

Besides Marozsan, Frankfurt – who were third in last season's Frauen Bundesliga – have also lost Simone Laudehr, who should pass a century of German caps during the Olympics, to Bayern Munich. That enhances the chance of Bayern, who are taking their women's team increasingly seriously, making it a

The 2016-17 Season: League by league

AUSTRIA
Clubs: 10
Starts: August
Champions: St Polten-Spratzern

CZECH REPUBLIC
Clubs: 8
Starts: August
Champions: Sparta Prague

DENMARK
Clubs: 8
Starts: August
Champions: Fortuna Hjorring

FRANCE
Clubs: 12
Starts: September
Champions: Lyon

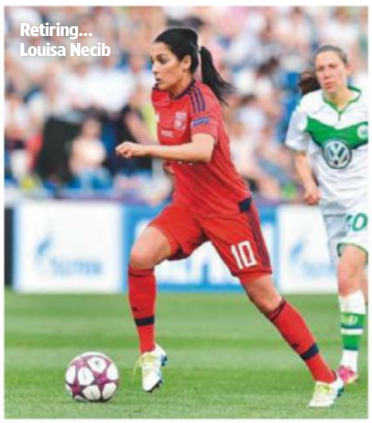
GERMANY
Clubs: 12
Starts: September
Champions: Bayern Munich

ITALY
Clubs: 12
Starts: October
Champions: Brescia

SPAIN
Clubs: 16
Starts: September
Champions: Athletic Bilbao

* The other leagues ranked top 10 by UEFA (England, Russia and Sweden) play during the summer, along with the US, though England is changing.

Champions...Lyon celebrate beating Wolfsburg in the Final


Retiring... Louisa Necib

third successive domestic title. The main focus, however, is likely to be on Europe after they suffered a shock defeat to Twente in the opening round of 32 last time out.

Wolfsburg, runners-up at home and in the Champions League last term, are Germany's other entrants in the latter competition, but there will be much attention on Sand, who finished ninth last season, after they brought Colin Bell back from Norway. Bell became the first English coach to win either the men's or women's Champions League when he steered Frankfurt to the title in 2015.

In Spain, Athletic Bilbao discovered a huge well of latent support when they won the title in June, with an estimated 20,000 taking to the streets of the Basque city to celebrate. The *Leonas*' first triumph since 2007 ended a run of four successive titles for Barcelona who, backed by the men's club and now professional, responded by signing Brazilian international Andressa Alves from Montpellier and Denmark's Line Roddik from Lyon.

Englishman abroad... Sand coach Colin Bell

Women's football in Italy is not as successful as it should be, with the native talent not being matched by support from the federation or men's clubs. The beginning of last season's Femminile Serie A was marked by a strike threat at the lack

of backing and went ahead without Torres, three-times Champions League quarter-finalists in the previous six years, who folded for financial reasons.

But the situation may be changing. Brescia won the title from Verona last season but faced unexpected competition from Fiorentina, who became the first club fully affiliated with a men's team. Co-owner and former men's president Andrea Della Valle was said to be influential in the development and Sandro Mencucci, *La Viola*'s executive managing director, said he wanted to launch a cultural revolution, adding: "It is time to give credence to women athletes."

Evidence of how long a road to that destination is came from across the Atlantic, where Hope Solo – one of the most decorated, controversial and high-profile female athletes – revealed how poor conditions are for players even in the flagship league of the sport's most successful nation.

The National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) is the third attempt at forming a professional female league in the USA and has been relatively successful, especially in Portland. But it is slow progress. In July, Western New York Flash and Seattle Reign had to play on a pitch squeezed to 53m wide to avoid a baseball diamond.

Cup clash...Brescia (in blue) and Wolfsburg

That prompted Solo, who was not playing but is Seattle's regular first-choice goalkeeper, to release a lacerating blog criticising playing and practice facilities, accommodation, equipment, medical and technical support, security and refereeing standards, and pay.

"It's far past time that the women in our league start being treated like professional athletes," said Solo. "Otherwise, we might as well just admit the NWSL is just a semi-pro league and stop pretending like it's the best women's league in the world."

WSL moves to winter

While most of England comes to terms with the implications of the Brexit referendum vote, the women's game has decided to align itself more closely with the continent. So, to an appropriate backdrop of steady rain at Wembley Stadium in July, the Football Association announced the Women's Super League will become a winter competition in 2017.

The FA WSL, England's first genuine semi-professional women's league, launched as a summer competition in 2011, and that decision was taken with a view to attracting family audiences and to assist the national team's preparation for major tournaments.

However, the negative impact of school holidays is thought to offset the benefits of warmer weather on attendances. And, despite England's success at the 2015 Women's World Cup, there does not seem to be any significant improvement in player fitness at tournaments. England came third in Canada, but injury hampered key players such as Jodie Taylor, Jordan Nobbs and Fara Williams.

Being out of kilter with the FIFA calendar has also undermined the chances of England's clubs in UEFA's Champions League – Arsenal, who were winners in 2007, are the country's only finalists – and resulted in a chaotic, stop-start WSL fixture list. In addition, the summer season is out of synch with the Women's FA Cup and the rest of the women's football pyramid in England, making promotion and relegation to and from the two-division WSL problematic. Moreover, as the league has developed, clubs have become closely aligned with men's teams and often their pitches, which means there has to be a break after the men's season while these are re-seeded.

Dominant...Chelsea and Manchester City

This is a real problem for some clubs and Doncaster Rovers Belles, for example, had played only one home game by mid-July while some other sides had played five. The Belles, who ground-share with the Rovers men's team, were at this stage bottom, pointless and had already changed manager.

Home disadvantage... Doncaster Rovers Belles (in yellow)

The next WSL season will start in September 2017 and run to May 2018 with a one-month winter break. To fill the void between November, when the current season ends, and the start of Euro 2017 in July, there will be a one-off Spring Series with trophies but no promotion or relegation.

The present WSL season was shaping up to be a two-horse race between defending champions Chelsea and last season's runners-up Manchester City, both of whom are well integrated with their respective men's clubs. However, that was until once-dominant Arsenal won at Chelsea to move into contention, although City still remain firm favourites.

Earlier in the summer, Chelsea lost their Women's FA Cup crown to Arsenal in a Wembley Final watched by 32, 912 – a new attendance record. WS

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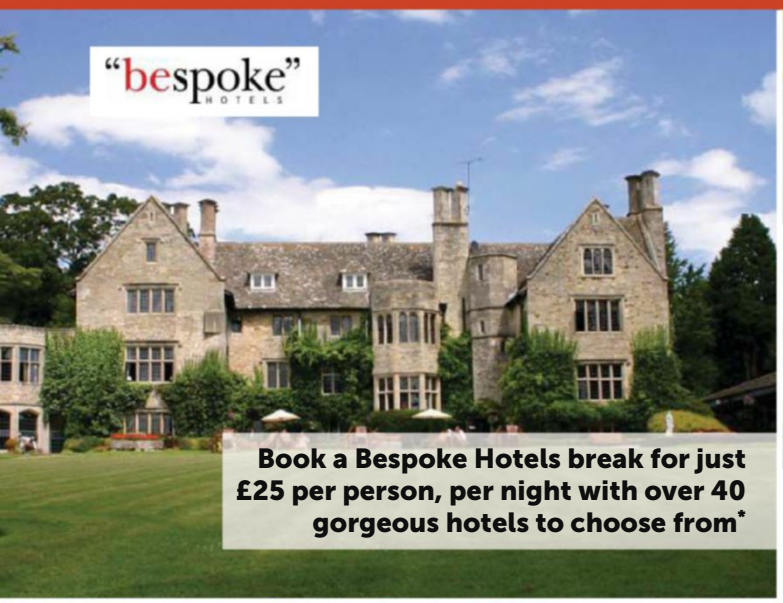

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Facetoface

FERNANDO SANTOS

"We did what we needed to do to win"

Portugal's Euro-winning coach reflects on his team's triumph in France

Now things have settled down a little after victory in France, what do you feel in particular?
That we did our duty.

Not relief or pleasure?
Naturally happiness comes into it, especially for the team, the country and the federation. Pleasure also is a part of it. It's not everyday you become European champions.

You are Portuguese but took Greece to Euro 2012 and the 2014 World Cup. Does it make it more special that Portugal went decades without winning a title before you came along?
Of course. That's normal. I had an emotional bond with Greece. I worked there for many years and had a place for them in my heart. But Portugal is my homeland. It's where I was born, grew up and became the man that I am. The feelings I'm experiencing right now are unique, deep and really intensive.

In your hour of victory, did you dedicate the title to Greece?
The 13 years I worked in that country shaped me and left their mark on me. The way in which I was accepted there has left strong ties which remain today. I think that a lot of Greeks will take a lot of satisfaction from our Euro 2016 title. When I lived out there I used to say that I felt like a Greek and I really meant it. I loved my life there. However, my heart never stopped beating for Portugal.

Portuguese fans in France often outsung larger numbers of opposition supporters. How important was that?
It was fantastic. I'd even say it was decisive for the end result.

Decisive?
Yes, along with other things. When you go abroad and you have such support, it doesn't only give you strength, it brings out in the team the desire to return the favour in the shape of victories. In our camp, in Marcoussis near Paris, we'd often be woken by fans singing the national anthem. They were indescribable moments.

Among those who stepped up were 18-year-old Renato Sanches and 22-year-old Raphael Guerreiro...
Both made their contribution. But I don't want to single out anyone. The whole squad dedicated themselves to the cause.

What are your goals regarding the introduction of new blood looking forward to the World Cup in 2018 ?
When I began in this job, the average age of the squad was 28, 29. The same at the Euros. For the first group game, it was barely 29; in the final, 27. During the qualifiers it simply wasn't possible to think about reducing the age of the side. That only began in France.

Why?
It's a natural process. If a young player shows sufficient quality, he deserves to be picked. Looking at the youth development work in Portugal these past few years, we can look at the future with confidence. We currently are European under-17 champions, and a year ago continental runners-up at under-21 level. There'll be others pushing themselves forward. I have to stress that no one knows what the future holds for us, least of all me.

Your European champions had 10 players who either came through the Sporting youth ranks or still play there. How significant is that to you?
As national coach, I don't want to think along tribal lines. All I know is that Portugal's future is dependant on the work in the clubs. If the groundwork, the basics, are not right, the federation's structures aren't so good. The clubs are our construction workers.

In France, your side was criticised for not playing attractively. Deserved or not?
I'm immune to it. Neither the team or myself should be bothered with all that.

Once again, you didn't especially play the beautiful game...
We didn't go to France to put on a show and return home after two or three wonderful games. We did what we needed to do to win.

After he came off injured, Cristiano Ronaldo was like a whirling dervish on the touchline towards the end of the Final, energised by victory...
From the very start, he was inspired by the idea that triumph was possible. If the captain, who as a player has won everything, is so confident, that transmits itself to the team.

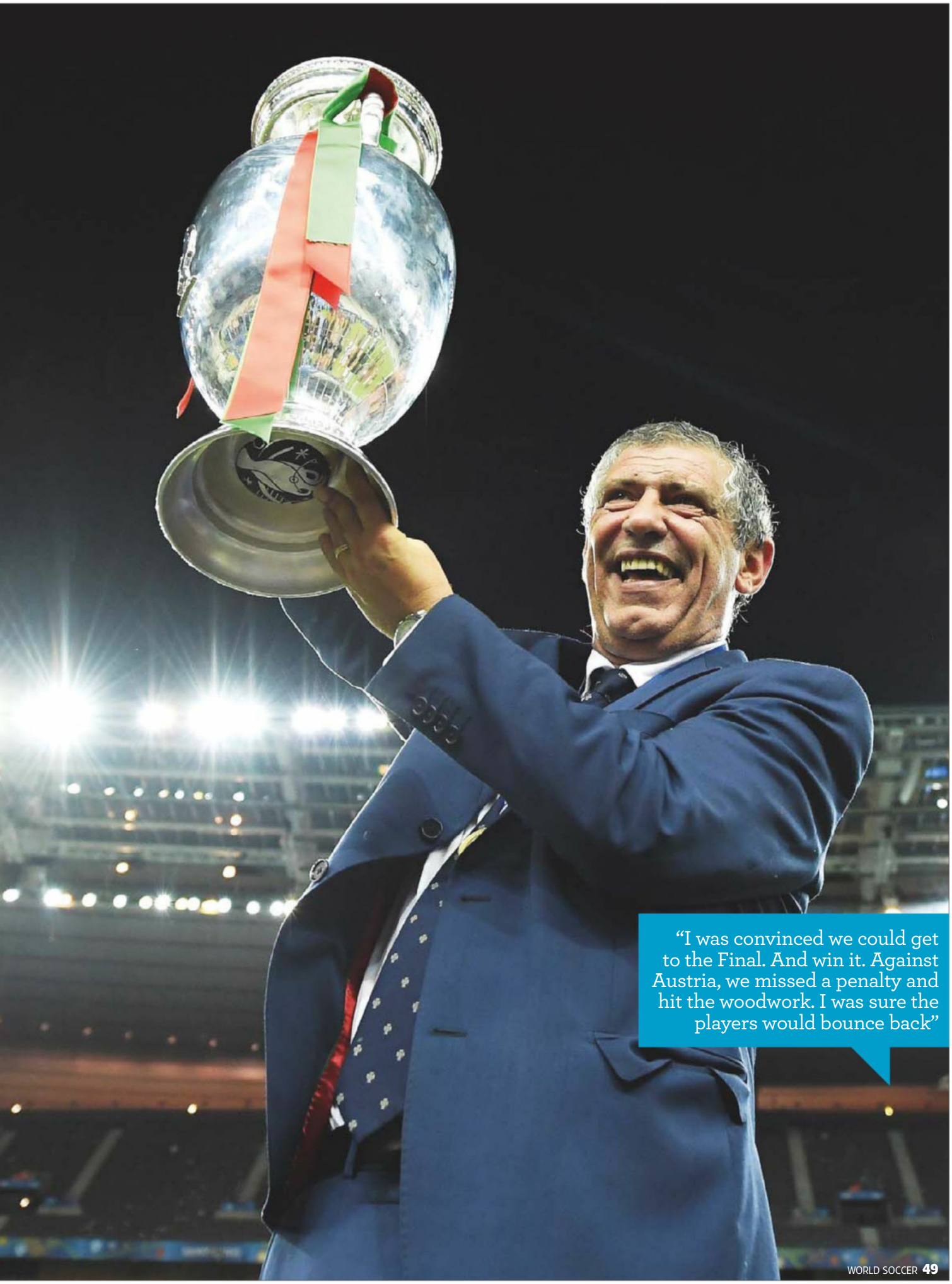
After the goalless draw with Austria in your second group game, you said that Portugal would only be flying home after the Final on July 11. That was very bold...
I was convinced we could get to the Final. And win it. Against Austria, we missed a penalty and hit the woodwork. I was sure the players would bounce back. It was clear in my mind. It was possible. I'd written something along those lines on the afternoon of the Austria match.

A letter you read out after the victory in the Final...
It wasn't a letter. Just thoughts which went through my head before we played Austria. I was laying down and it just made sense to me.

You paid thanks to God, Jesus, Mary, your players, family, friends and federation officials...
I'm a man of belief, not superstition. The thoughts I had on the day of the Austria match were strong that I wanted to make them public. It was the right time.

Will you be going on a pilgrimage to Fatima [a famous Catholic shrine in Portugal]?
I go to church every Sunday. Belief, for me, is not a show. I wouldn't go to Fatima because of the Euro title. I'd go whenever.

Interview by Jose Martins/ESM



"I was convinced we could get to the Final. And win it. Against Austria, we missed a penalty and hit the woodwork. I was sure the players would bounce back"

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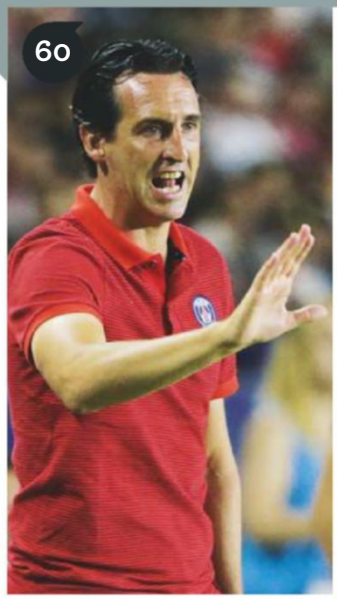

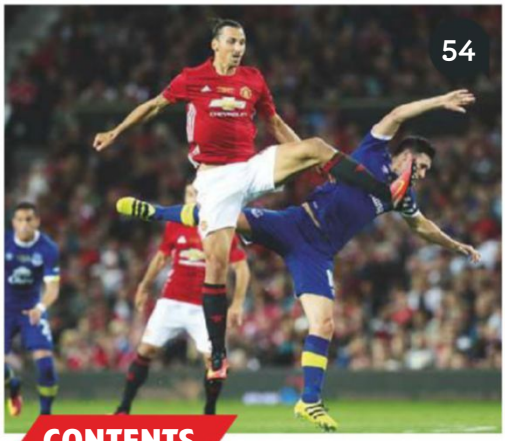

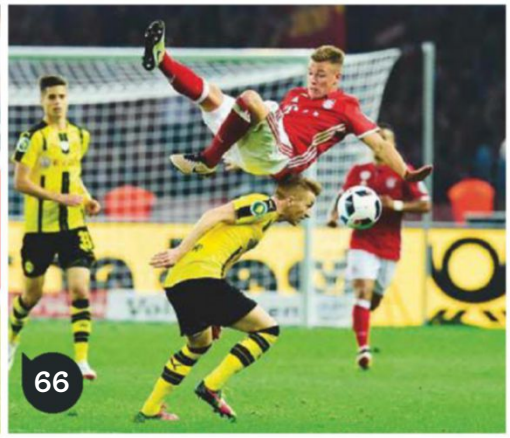

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It's all change...but title battle will stay the same

The rules of Belgium's top divisions, with their interminable play-offs, have never been easy to understand. But never fear, they are changing again. This season, the number of professional clubs in the country will decrease from 34 to 24. This change has been pushed through by the Pro League, who want to avoid clubs falling into financial difficulties. There will be stricter rules for clubs applying for a professional licence and they must prove they have financial backing to ensure long-term survival.

In practical terms, this means there are still 16 clubs in the top flight, but just eight in the second tier. These will be called League 1A and League 1B – with the latter being the second tier – and at the end of the regular season there will, of course, be play-offs.

But while the structure may have changed, it will be Anderlecht, Club Brugge, Genk, Gent and Standard Liege battling it out for league honours, as usual.

Last season, Michel Preud'homme's

Hands on...New Anderlecht coach Rene Weiler

Club Brugge triumphed as they were the only club to show any kind of consistency. During the summer it was agreed that Preud'homme would become manager of the club in a more English tradition – with added input on transfers and less time actually coaching – and it will be interesting to see how that develops.

Anderlecht were runners-up last season, and two years without winning the title inevitably led to the demise of Besnik Hasi. He has been replaced by Swiss coach Rene Weiler, who moves from German second-tier club Nuremberg. Rather like the national side, Anderlecht resemble a bunch of individuals who need to be moulded into a team and Weiler could be the man to do just that.

Gent took third spot last time out, which was a disappointment following the signing of Mbark Boussoufa in the winter transfer window. However, it was his arrival that caused the problem as coach Hein Vanhaezebrouck had created a team without stars and the Moroccan playmaker disrupted the harmony in the title-holders' dressing room. Vanhaezebrouck had not wanted the player and the team were never the same again, taking just 12 points from 10 games in the play-offs.

During the summer, Gent lost goalkeeper Matz Sels to Newcastle United and captain Sven Kums could also be on this way too, so with Vanhaezebrouck and the club management seemingly not on the

Intent...Club Brugge (in blue) beat Standard Liege 2-1 in July's Super Cup

BELGIAN LEAGUE 1A: 2016-17

1 Anderlecht
2 Charleroi
3 Club Brugge *(Bruges)*
4 Eupen
5 Genk
6 Gent
7 Kortrijk
8 Lokeren
9 Mechelen
10 Mouscron-Peruwelz *(Mouscron)*
11 Oostende *(Ostend)*
12 Sint-Truiden
13 Standard Liege
14 Waasland-Beveren *(Beveren)*
15 Westerlo
16 Zulte Waregem *(Waregem)*

KEY DATES
The season started on July 29 and will finish in May 2017. Early key games include Club Brugge v Standard Liege (August 28) and Club Brugge v Anderlecht (October 23).

TALKING POINTS

● Although Anderlecht's Youri Tielemans is still a teenager, he has more than 100 games to his name. However, he has yet to make himself indispensable or to demonstrate his talents consistently. Will the 19-year-old finally live up to expectations?
● Michel Preud'homme has handed over more responsibility at Club Brugge to his assistant, Philippe Clement, but could that affect the stability at a club where Preud'homme was a big driving force in their title-winning season?
● When Roland Duchatelet sold Standard Liege it was thought that he would focus his attention on Sint-Truiden, rather than on Charlton Athletic. This season should give some indications as to whether that will indeed be the case.
● With promoted Eupen being owned by the Qatar Aspire Academy, it will be interesting to see how they make use of a club in the heart of Europe.
● Will Club Brugge's Timmy Simons continue to be effective as he reaches 40 years of age? Last season, he captained the side to the title aged 39, making 45 appearances. A fitness fanatic, he will be keen to lift the trophy for a second time in June.

Veteran...Club Brugge skipper Timmy Simons

Disruption...the arrival of Mbark Boussoufa (centre) did not help Gent last term

same wavelength, they could struggle.

Genk almost caught Gent during the play-offs and coach Peter Maes has a talented young side. They could be a side to watch this season if they can keep their players. Christian Kabasele has already gone to Watford and other young talents could following him out of the door.

Standard Liege missed the play-offs last term as they went through yet another transitional season. They should have some stability now as the squad has remained more or less the same, with useful acquisitions in Jean-Francois Gillet and Ibrahima Cisse, both of whom have played for the club before. This will be coach Yannick Ferrera's first full season and all eyes will be on Daniel Van Buyten, who is having an impact at the club in a quasi "technical advisor" role.

These five clubs should make the play-offs and are likely to be joined by Oostende, who had an impressive season under Marc Coucke, the CEO of Omega Pharma, and coach Yves Vanderhaeghe. Oostende have signed keeper Silvio Proto from Anderlecht and centre-back Mathias Bossaerts from Manchester City, who was once hailed as the "next big thing".

John Chapman

New role...Michel Preud'homme

ONES TO WATCH

DAVY ROEF *(Anderlecht)*
At 22, has the chance to be Anderlecht's first-choice keeper now that Silvio Proto has gone, but 16-year-old Mile Svilar is waiting in the wings.

LEANDRO TROSSARD *(Genk)*
Back at Genk after being loaned out to several clubs, he's an attacking midfielder who could replace Thomas Buffel.

MATHIEU DOSSEVI *(Standard Liege)*
Signed from Olympiakos last season and did enough in his first season to ensure a permanent deal.

LEON BAILEY *(Genk)*
A teenage Jamaican winger who was close to joining Chelsea before settling on Genk. Young player of the year in Belgium last season.

BRECHT DEJAEGERE *(Gent)*
Instrumental in Gent's title-winning season in 2015, he was badly injured last term and missed all of the play-offs.

HANS VANAKEN *(Club Brugge)*
Joined from Lokeren and could dominate proceedings at the Jan Breydel stadium now that Argentinian midfielder Victor Vazquez has gone.

WILFRED NDIDI *(Genk)*
Nigerian international centre-back who has been watched by several English clubs. Genk fans hope the teen will stay for one more season.

After the miracle of Leicester, big guns prepare to fight back

City boss... Pep Guardiola

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE 2016-17

1 Arsenal *(London)*
Chelsea
Crystal Palace
Tottenham Hotspur
West Ham United
2 Bournemouth
3 Burnley
4 Everton *(Liverpool)*
Liverpool
5 Hull City
6 Leicester City
7 Manchester City
Manchester United
8 Middlesbrough
9 Southampton
10 Stoke City
11 Sunderland
12 Swansea City
13 Watford
14 West Bromwich Albion

It still seems extraordinary, three months after the close of the most remarkable league campaign in modern English football history, to be writing the words that Leicester City are the Premier League champions.

Claudio Ranieri's side won the title with a 10-point gap to second-placed Arsenal and made a mockery of the predictions made by pundits, bookies and fans. So it is perhaps a surprise to see so many people dismissing their chances of retaining their crown.

However, a number of factors will make life much more difficult for Leicester this time around.

For starters, they face the added challenge of Champions League football for the first time. Ranieri was lucky with injuries last season and was able to pick pretty much his first-choice XI for most Premier League games. Leicester also benefitted from their closest rivals' involvement in European competition.

Although Leicester will be playing more games, they must do so without key figures, notably N'Golo Kante, who jumped ship to Chelsea. There are also doubts over the future of winger Riyad Mahrez, although England striker Jamie Vardy spurned the advances of Arsenal to stay put. The decision of chief scout Steve Walsh to join Everton as director of football may not have an immediate impact on team matters, but it was indicative of the turbulence that the title triumph may yet cause at the King Power stadium.

Before his departure, Walsh was involved in some interesting signings: Nampalys Mendy from Nice as a likely

Wanted...Riyad Mahrez (right)

replacement for Kante, and Nigerian forward Ahmed Musa.

But the major reason that lightning may not strike twice in Leicester is the summer activity of the league's wealthiest clubs.

Last year, Leicester were able to take advantage of one of the most open title races of recent times. Defending champions Chelsea suffered a meltdown that forced out Jose Mourinho, while both Manchester clubs were hamstrung by the final days of their respective coaches. City drifted under Manuel Pellegrini, while United staggered, confused by Louis Van Gaal's tactics, through most of the campaign.

Only Mauricio Pochettino's Tottenham Hotspur, themselves relative newcomers to a title bid, offered a sustained challenge, and even then they collapsed in the final weeks of the campaign.

This season, though, things are different, with new men in charge at Chelsea, City and United – and, of course, they are not just any old coaches. Pep Guardiola, Antonio Conte and the returning Mourinho each bring a renewed sense of purpose to their respective clubs – and they are being backed with serious cash in the transfer market.

At Chelsea, there will be no European distractions, such was the extent of their failure last season. But new boss Conte is sure to spark a revival at Stamford Bridge. Much of the deadwood has been dispatched, while new signings Kante (£32m) and striker Michy Batshuayi (£33m) will bring new energy.

The big test for Conte will be in reviving the form of players who dipped alarmingly last season: the likes of Eden Hazard, Cesc Fabregas and Nemanja Matic. Meanwhile, John Terry has kept the captaincy and could yet play a leading role.

At Manchester City, Guardiola's new regime has already placed more emphasis on improved fitness and greater urgency among the players, with Frenchman Samir Nasri picked out as having returned from his summer holiday overweight.

> "In the Premier League, every club is hugely ambitious. With the cheques that everybody signs, it's quite scary"
> **Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger**

City's spending – on the likes of Ilkay Gundogan, Leroy Sane and Nolito – will easily surpass the £100m mark if they succeed in the capture of long-term target John Stones, the 22-year-old Everton and England defender.

If his past experiences at Barcelona and Bayern Munich are any guide, Guardiola

PROMOTED TEAMS

BURNLEY
Promoted back to the top flight as champions after a season away. Manager Sean Dyche lost key players on relegation but maintained a tough-to-beat team.

MIDDLESBROUGH
Back after eight seasons away. Still backed by local businessman Steve Gibson, now managed by Aitor Karanka.

HULL CITY
Back after one season, via a play-off Final victory over Sheffield Wednesday. Controversial owner Assem Allam and his family are looking to sell and manager Steve Bruce walked away in the summer.

Fit again...Manchester City's Sergio Aguero

TALKING POINTS

- Premier League clubs did little business on the back of Euro 2016. Arsenal's deal for Granit Xhaka was done before the tournament kicked off. Palace signed Steve Mandanda, France's non-playing goalkeeper, during the tournament. Burnley signed Iceland captain Johann Berg Gudmundsson.
- Sam Allardyce's appointment as England manager disrupted Sunderland's pre-season plans and David Moyes must act quickly to get things up to speed.
- All change at Everton where Ronald Koeman is the new manager and Leicester City's highly regarded chief scout Steve Walsh is director of football.
- Will Watford regret sacking Quique Sanchez Flores? After their mid-table finish and FA Cup run, Watford have switched coaches again, offering Walter Mazzarri his first job outside of Italy.

Early...Andros Townsend

- Last season's FA Cup runners-up Crystal Palace demonstrated the Premier League's newfound wealth with early deals for Mandanda, Andros Townsend and James Tomkins, as well as bids for Christian Benteke and Saido Berahino.
- How much time will the Manchester United youngsters blooded by Louis Van Gaal get under Jose Mourinho? The new boss insists his record on bringing through youth is strong.
- Southampton have continued to sell players – Sadio Mane to Liverpool, VIctor Wanyama to Tottenham, Graziano Pelle to China – but how long can the juggling act continue?
- The new TV deal is forcing transfer fees up across the league, with Bournemouth paying a club record £15m to Liverpool for Jordon Ibe.
- Will West Ham's move to the Olympic stadium, at the taxpayer's expense, help them move into the top tier of the Premier League?

Club record...Bournemouth signing Jordon Ibe

will keep his distance from the media. But there will still be intense scrutiny of his renewed rivalry with Mourinho. The pair clashed in Spain when Mourinho's Real Madrid battled with Guardiola's Barcelona side on a number of fronts.

Mourinho won few friends in Spain for his baiting of the Barca coaching staff, not least when he poked the late Tito Vilanova, then Guardiola's assistant, in the eye during the Spanish Super Cup match in 2011.

So far, the Portuguese has been sweetness and light since his arrival in Manchester – just like on his return to Chelsea three years ago, before things turned sour. Mourinho was the controversial choice of United chief executive Ed Woodward, despite a history of pragmatic football and a reluctance to blood youngsters – factors which could easily ignite tensions at Old Trafford if he does not hit the ground running.

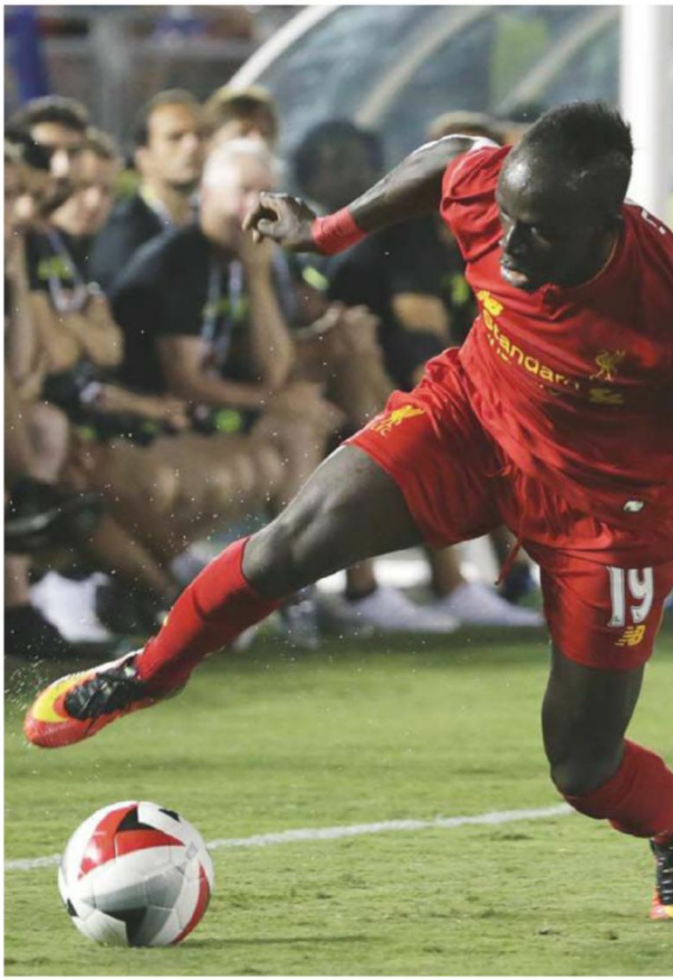
Mourinho was quick to defend his record with young players, even to the point of producing a list of 50 youngsters (mostly obscure) who had made their debuts under his tutelage. It remains to be seen whether the likes of Marcus Rashford, last season's sensation, will continue to be regulars this season. Especially as the superstar quotient has moved up several notches with the arrival of several big egos.

Armenian attacking midfielder Henrikh Mkhitaryan and Ivorian defender Eric Bailly look useful additions, while Zlatan Ibrahimovic could prove an inspired signing, if only because of the social-media connections that have already delighted United's marketing people.

United's pre-season was disrupted by a chaotic tour of China, where commercial considerations took precedence over football matters, leaving Mourinho to question the wisdom of such ventures.

Chelsea, City and United will not be the only challengers for Leicester's crown. North London may yet play an important role. Arsenal have made an astute acquisition in Swiss midfielder Granit Xhaka, but their search for a high-profile

Challenge...Spurs' new signing Victor Wanyama (left) in pre-season action against Juventus



Old and new...John Terry (right) of Chelsea and Liverpool's Sadio Mane of Liverpool

Hopeful...West Ham

ONES TO WATCH

MICHY BATSHUAYI
(Chelsea)
The Belgian striker is a raw talent who was prolific for Marseille. His arrival raises questions about Diego Costa's future at Stamford Bridge.

AHMED MUSA
(Leicester City)
Speedy Nigerian striker who is similar in style to Leicester City's Jamie Vardy and can also play wide. Signed from CSKA Moscow.

GRANIT XHAKA
(Arsenal)
Swiss international midfielder who was signed from Borussia Monchengladbach before the Euros and brings bite to Arsenal's midfield.

HENRIKH MKHITARYAN
(Manchester United)
Talented Armenian playmaker signed from Borussia Dortmund for what was a world-record fee for a player in the last year of a contract.

PIERRE-EMILE HOJBJERG
(Southampton)
Danish midfielder who was highly rated by Pep Guardiola while at Bayern Munich before leaving to seek first-team opportunities.

Leap forward...Arsenal's Mathieu Debuchy

Vincent Janssen. But it remains to be seen how much the likes of Dele Alli, Eric Dier and Harry Kane will have been affected by England's Euro 2016 collapse.

Liverpool, too, have ambitions of breaking back into the top four. Their summer acquisitions – including Dutch midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum from Newcastle and Senegalese attacker Sadio Mane from Southampton – were safe, albeit expensive, signings, while defender Joel Matip, on a free from Schalke, may prove a more effective buy.

The feeling persists that manager Jurgen Klopp does not have the genuine quality needed to have Liverpool competing at the very highest level.

The likes of Liverpool and Leicester may yet feel the heat from middle-ranking teams such as West Ham United, Stoke City, Everton and Crystal Palace.

Emboldened by the bumper new television deal and given hope by Leicester's remarkable achievement last season, there could yet be another surprise in store in what looks to be a wide-open title race.

Gavin Hamilton

striker was proving fruitless, with rejections from Vardy and Lyon following an enquiry regarding Alexandre Lacazette.

Manager Arsene Wenger bemoaned the "scary" amounts being spent elsewhere, saying: "I personally believe that no matter what you do, it's never enough. In the Premier League, every club is hugely ambitious. With the cheques that everybody signs, it's quite scary."

Tottenham will be expected to maintain their challenge from last season, especially after the signings of Kenyan midfielder Victor Wanyama and Dutch forward

Watchful...Jose Mourinho (in white)

NEW COACHES

ANTONIO CONTE
(Chelsea)
Arrives at Stamford Bridge after guiding Italy to the Euro quarter-finals.

RONALD KOEMAN
(Everton)
Prised away from Southampton and eager to make his own mark at Goodison Park.

DAVID MOYES
(Sunderland)
Out of work since sacking by Real Sociedad last year, he took over from England-bound Sam Allardyce.

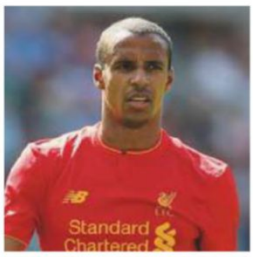
CLAUDE PUEL
(Southampton)
Former Monaco, Lille and Lyon coach who took Nice to fourth place in Ligue 1 last season.

PEP GUARDIOLA
(Manchester City)
City hope he will transform their football and take them to the next level in Europe.

JOSE MOURINHO
(Man United)
Sacked by Chelsea in December after they lost nine out of their 16 league games.

VACANT
(Hull City)
Pre-season turned chaotic when Steve Bruce resigned three weeks prior to the start of the new campaign.

WALTER MAZZARRI
(Watford)
The ex-Napoli and Internazionale boss is Watford's seventh manager in four years.



JOEL MATIP
(Liverpool)
Ball-playing centre-back who has also been used in midfield. Signed on a free from Schalke, he was born in Germany but plays for Cameroon.

ILKAY GUNDOGAN
(Manchester City)
German international who will bring playmaking skills to City's midfield. Missed Euro 2016 with an injury that will delay his Premier League debut.

VINCENT JANSSEN
(Tottenham Hotspur)
Powerful striker who was the top scorer in the Dutch league last season with 27 goals for AZ, who sold the 22-year-old for a club record fee of £17m.

GOKHAN TORE
(West Ham United)
German-born winger who was on Chelsea's books as a teenager. Played for current West Ham boss Slaven Bilic at Besiktas in Turkey.

STEVE MANDANDA
(Crystal Palace)
France's back-up keeper at Euro 2016, he was out of contract at Marseille and snapped up by Palace. Has three brothers, all of whom are goalkeepers.

Sep 10...Manchester United v Manchester City

Nov 26...Watford v Stoke City

FIXTURES

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13, 2016
Burnley v Swansea City
Crystal Palace v WBA
Everton v Tottenham Hotspur
Hull City v Leicester City
Manchester City v Sunderland
Middlesbrough v Stoke City
Southampton v Watford

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 2016
Arsenal v Liverpool
Bournemouth v Manchester United

MONDAY, AUGUST 15, 2016
Chelsea v West Ham United

FRIDAY, AUGUST 19, 2016
Manchester United v Southampton

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 2016
Burnley v Liverpool
Leicester City v Arsenal
Stoke City v Manchester City
Swansea City v Hull City
Tottenham Hotspur v Crystal Palace
Watford v Chelsea
WBA v Everton

SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 2016
Sunderland v Middlesbrough
West Ham United v Bournemouth

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27, 2016
Chelsea v Burnley
Crystal Palace v Bournemouth
Everton v Stoke City
Hull City v Manchester United
Leicester City v Swansea City
Southampton v Sunderland
Tottenham Hotspur v Liverpool
Watford v Arsenal

SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2016
Manchester City v West Ham United
WBA v Middlesbrough

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2016
Arsenal v Southampton
Bournemouth v WBA
Burnley v Hull City
Liverpool v Leicester City
Manchester United v Manchester City
Middlesbrough v Crystal Palace
Stoke City v Tottenham Hotspur
West Ham United v Watford

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2016
Swansea City v Chelsea

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2016
Sunderland v Everton

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2016
Chelsea v Liverpool

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2016
Everton v Middlesbrough
Hull City v Arsenal
Leicester City v Burnley
Manchester City v Bournemouth
WBA v West Ham United

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2016
Crystal Palace v Stoke City
Southampton v Swansea City
Tottenham Hotspur v Sunderland
Watford v Manchester United

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2016
Arsenal v Chelsea
Bournemouth v Everton
Liverpool v Hull City
Manchester United v Leicester City
Middlesbrough v Tottenham Hotspur
Stoke City v WBA
Sunderland v Crystal Palace
Swansea City v Manchester City

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2016
West Ham United v Southampton

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2016
Burnley v Watford

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2016
Burnley v Arsenal
Everton v Crystal Palace
Hull City v Chelsea
Leicester City v Southampton
Manchester United v Stoke City
Sunderland v WBA
Swansea City v Liverpool
Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester City
Watford v Bournemouth
West Ham United v Middlesbrough

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2016
Arsenal v Swansea City
Bournemouth v Hull City
Chelsea v Leicester City
Crystal Palace v West Ham United
Liverpool v Manchester United
Manchester City v Everton
Middlesbrough v Watford
Southampton v Burnley
Stoke City v Sunderland
WBA v Tottenham Hotspur

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2016
Arsenal v Middlesbrough
Bournemouth v Tottenham Hotspur
Burnley v Everton
Chelsea v Manchester United
Hull City v Stoke City
Leicester City v Crystal Palace
Liverpool v WBA
Manchester City v Southampton
Swansea City v Watford
West Ham United v Sunderland

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2016
Crystal Palace v Liverpool
Everton v West Ham United
Manchester United v Burnley
Middlesbrough v Bournemouth
Southampton v Chelsea
Stoke City v Swansea City
Sunderland v Arsenal
Tottenham Hotspur v Leicester City
Watford v Hull City
WBA v Manchester City

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2016
Arsenal v Tottenham Hotspur
Bournemouth v Sunderland
Burnley v Crystal Palace
Chelsea v Everton
Hull City v Southampton
Leicester City v WBA
Liverpool v Watford
Manchester City v Middlesbrough
Swansea City v Manchester United
West Ham United v Stoke City

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2016
Crystal Palace v Manchester City
Everton v Swansea City
Manchester United v Arsenal
Middlesbrough v Chelsea
Southampton v Liverpool
Stoke City v Bournemouth
Sunderland v Hull City
Tottenham Hotspur v West Ham United
Watford v Leicester City
WBA v Burnley

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2016
Arsenal v Bournemouth
Burnley v Manchester City
Chelsea v Tottenham Hotspur
Hull City v WBA
Leicester City v Middlesbrough
Liverpool v Sunderland
Manchester United v West Ham United
Southampton v Everton
Swansea City v Crystal Palace
Watford v Stoke City

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2016
Bournemouth v Liverpool
Crystal Palace v Southampton
Everton v Manchester United
Manchester City v Chelsea
Middlesbrough v Hull City
Stoke City v Burnley
Sunderland v Leicester City
Tottenham Hotspur v Swansea City
WBA v Watford
West Ham United v Arsenal

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2016
Arsenal v Stoke City
Burnley v Bournemouth
Chelsea v WBA
Hull City v Crystal Palace
Leicester City v Manchester City
Liverpool v West Ham United
Manchester United v Tottenham Hotspur
Southampton v Middlesbrough
Swansea City v Sunderland
Watford v Everton

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2016
Bournemouth v Leicester City
Crystal Palace v Manchester United
Middlesbrough v Liverpool
Sunderland v Chelsea
WBA v Swansea City
West Ham United v Burnley

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2016
Everton v Arsenal
Manchester City v Watford
Stoke City v Southampton
Tottenham Hotspu v Hull City

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2016
Bournemouth v Southampton
Crystal Palace v Chelsea
Everton v Liverpool
Manchester City v Arsenal
Middlesbrough v Swansea City
Stoke City v Leicester City
Sunderland v Watford
Tottenham Hotspur v Burnley
WBA v Man United
West Ham United v Hull City

MONDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2016
Arsenal v WBA
Burnley v Middlesbrough
Chelsea v Bournemouth
Hull City v Manchester City
Leicester City v Everton
Liverpool v Stoke City
Manchester United v Sunderland
Southampton v Tottenham Hotspur
Swansea City v West Ham United
Watford v Crystal Palace

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2016
Arsenal v Crystal Palace
Burnley v Sunderland
Chelsea v Stoke City
Hull City v Everton
Leicester City v West Ham United
Liverpool v Manchester City
Manchester United v Middlesbrough

Feb 11...Arsenal v Hull City

Jan 2...Tottenham Hotspur v Chelsea

Southampton v WBA
Swansea City v Bournemouth
Watford v Tottenham Hotspur

MONDAY, JANUARY 2, 2017

Bournemouth v Arsenal
Crystal Palace v Swansea City
Everton v Southampton
Manchester City v Burnley
Middlesbrough v Leicester City
Stoke City v Watford
Sunderland v Liverpool
Tottenham Hotspur v Chelsea
WBA v Hull City
West Ham United v Manchester United

SATURDAY, JANUARY14, 2017

Burnley v Southampton
Everton v Manchester City
Hull City v Bournemouth
Leicester City v Chelsea
Manchester United v Liverpool
Sunderland v Stoke City
Swansea City v Arsenal
Tottenham Hotspur v WBA
Watford v Middlesbrough
West Ham United v Crystal Palace

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 2017

Arsenal v Burnley
Bournemouth v Watford
Chelsea v Hull City
Crystal Palace v Everton
Liverpool v Swansea City
Manchester City v Tottenham Hotspur
Middlesbrough v West Ham United
Southampton v Leicester City
Stoke City v Manchester United
WBA v Sunderland

TUESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2017

Arsenal v Watford
Bournemouth v Crystal Palace
Burnley v Leicester City
Manchester United v Hull City
Middlesbrough v WBA
Sunderland v Tottenham Hotspur
Swansea City v Southampton
West Ham United v Manchester City

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2017

Liverpool v Chelsea
Stoke City v Everton

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2017

Chelsea v Arsenal
Crystal Palace v Sunderland
Everton v Bournemouth
Hull City v Liverpool
Leicester City v Manchester United
Manchester City v Swansea City
Southampton v West Ham United
Tottenham Hotspur v Middlesbrough
Watford v Burnley
WBA v Stoke City

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2017

Arsenal v Hull City
Bournemouth v Manchester City
Burnley v Chelsea
Liverpool v Tottenham Hotspur
Manchester United v Watford
Middlesbrough v Everton
Stoke City v Crystal Palace
Sunderland v Southampton
Swansea City v Leicester City
West Ham United v WBA

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2017

Chelsea v Swansea City
Crystal Palace v Middlesbrough
Everton v Sunderland
Hull City v Burnley
Leicester City v Liverpool
Manchester City v Manchester United
Southampton v Arsenal
Tottenham Hotspur v Stoke City
Watford v West Ham United
WBA v Bournemouth

SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 2017

Leicester City v Hull City
Liverpool v Arsenal
Manchester United v Bournemouth
Stoke City v Middlesbrough
Sunderland v Manchester City
Swansea City v Burnley
Tottenham Hotspur v Everton
Watford v Southampton
WBA v Crystal Palace
West Ham United v Chelsea

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2017

Arsenal v Leicester City
Bournemouth v West Ham United
Chelsea v Watford
Crystal Palace v Tottenham Hotspur
Everton v WBA
Hull City v Swansea City
Manchester City v Stoke City
Middlesbrough v Sunderland
Southampton v Manchester United

SUNDAY, MARCH 12, 2017

Liverpool v Burnley

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017

Bournemouth v Swansea City
Crystal Palace v Watford
Everton v Hull City
Manchester City v Liverpool
Middlesbrough v Manchester United
Stoke City v Chelsea
Sunderland v Burnley
Tottenham Hotspur v Southampton
WBA v Arsenal
West Ham United v Leicester City

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

Arsenal v Manchester City
Burnley v Tottenham Hotspur
Chelsea v Crystal Palace
Hull City v West Ham United
Leicester City v Stoke City
Liverpool v Everton
Man United v WBA
Southampton v Bournemouth
Swansea City v Middlesbrough
Watford v Sunderland

TUESDAY, APRIL 4, 2017

Arsenal v West Ham United
Burnley v Stoke City
Hull City v Middlesbrough
Leicester City v Sunderland
Manchester United v Everton
Swansea City v Tottenham Hotspur
Watford v WBA

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2017

Chelsea v Manchester City
Liverpool v Bournemouth
Southampton v Crystal Palace

SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2017

Bournemouth v Chelsea
Crystal Palace v Arsenal
Everton v Leicester City
Manchester City v Hull City
Middlesbrough v Burnley
Stoke City v Liverpool
Sunderland v Manchester United
Tottenham Hotspur v Watford
WBA v Southampton
West Ham United v Swansea City

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2017

Crystal Palace v Leicester City
Everton v Burnley
Manchester United v Chelsea
Middlesbrough v Arsenal
Southampton v Manchester City
Stoke City v Hull City
Sunderland v West Ham United
Tottenham Hotspur v Bournemouth
Watford v Swansea City
WBA v Liverpool

SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 2017

Arsenal v Sunderland
Bournemouth v Middlesbrough
Burnley v Manchester United
Chelsea v Southampton
Hull City v Watford
Leicester City v Tottenham Hotspur
Liverpool v Crystal Palace
Manchester City v WBA
Swansea City v Stoke City
West Ham United v Everton

SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 2017

Crystal Palace v Burnley
Everton v Chelsea
Manchester United v Swansea City
Middlesbrough v Manchester City
Southampton v Hull City
Stoke City v West Ham United
Sunderland v Bournemouth
Tottenham Hotspur v Arsenal
Watford v Liverpool
WBA v Leicester City

SATURDAY, MAY 6, 2017

Arsenal v Manchester United
Bournemouth v Stoke City
Burnley v WBA
Chelsea v Middlesbrough
Hull City v Sunderland
Leicester City v Watford
Liverpool v Southampton
Manchester City v Crystal Palace
Swansea City v Everton
West Ham United v Tottenham Hotspur

SATURDAY, MAY 13, 2017

Bournemouth v Burnley
Crystal Palace v Hull City
Everton v Watford
Manchester City v Leicester City
Middlesbrough v Southampton
Stoke City v Arsenal
Sunderland v Swansea City
Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester United
WBA v Chelsea
West Ham United v Liverpool

SUNDAY, MAY 21, 2017

Arsenal v Everton
Burnley v West Ham United
Chelsea v Sunderland
Hull City v Tottenham Hotspur
Leicester City v Bournemouth
Liverpool v Middlesbrough
Manchester United v Crystal Palace
Southampton v Stoke City
Swansea City v WBA
Watford v Manchester City

(All dates subject to change)

Owners expect even more from quadruple winners PSG

If there was any doubt about the size of Paris Saint-Germain's ambitions, events at the capital club during the close season have made matters crystal clear. Under coach Laurent Blanc, PSG achieved a domestic clean sweep of Ligue 1 title, French Cup, League Cup and Champions Trophy last season. In the process, they picked up 96 league points, scored 102 goals, conceded just 19 and finished 31 points clear of second-placed Lyon. By any standards it was an incredible campaign. Yet Blanc still lost his job.

Such is the hunger of the club's Qatari hierarchy for European success, a limp Champions League quarter-final exit to Manchester City was too much for them to stomach. Showing ruthless efficiency, chairman Nasser Al Khelaifi told Blanc to pack his bags – a big one it would have needed to be too, given the former French national coach left with a cool €22million in severance pay after signing a two-year contract extension in February.

The man on whom Al Khelaifi is now pinning his hopes is Unai Emery. The 44-year-old Spaniard has an impressive European record, having guided Sevilla to the past three Europa League titles. "Unai has a proven talent to get the best out of a team," claims Al Khelaifi. "I'm convinced our fans will enjoy the spectacular football our team will play."

Whether Emery will enjoy the kind of stress that goes with managing a team whose owners have such sky-high expectations remains to be seen. He's signed a two-year deal with an option for a third, which doesn't exactly sound like a ringing endorsement or a commitment to build for the long term. Instant success is expected, and there is clearly no financial barrier to sending a coach away with his tail between his legs if he doesn't deliver.

Emery has been quick to remould his squad to prepare for the challenge ahead following the departure of king-turned-legend Zlatan Ibrahimovic to Manchester United and the somewhat surprising sale of full-back Lucas Digne to Barcelona.

In come Polish defensive midfielder Grzegorz Krychowiak from Emery's former club Sevilla and Belgium's former Club Brugge right-back Thomas Meunier, along with the much-travelled and not-a-little controversial Hatem Ben Arfa. Regarded

Ahead... Benjamin Stambouli and PSG are the team to beat

PROMOTED TEAMS

NANCY
Back in Ligue 1 for the first time since 2013. Uruguayan coach Pablo Correa led the club for nine years before leaving for Evian. He rejoined Nancy in 2013.

DIJON
Ater topping the Ligue 2 table on no less than 20 occasions last season, Dijon had to settle for second place despite setting club records for points, wins and number of games without defeat.

METZ
Back after one season in Ligue 2 and will hope to emulate Angers, who came up in third position and finished ninth last term.

NEW COACHES

JOCELYN GOURVENNEC *(Bordeaux)*
The 44-year-old gets his first big job after performing wonders at little Guingamp for six years, winning promotion in 2013 and the French Cup in 2014.

ANTOINE KOMBOUARE (Guingamp)
Much-travelled 52-year-old who has signed a three-year deal to take over at his sixth French club. Coach of PSG between 2009 and 2011, he left Ligue 2 outfit Lens after guiding them to sixth place last season.

RENE GIRARD *(Nantes)*
Won the title with Montpellier in 2012 and back in the game a year after leaving Lille. The 62-year-old, who worked in the French national set-up between 1998 and 2008, replaces Michel Der Zakarian.

LUCIEN FAVRE *(Nice)*
The 58-year-old Swiss coach takes over from Claude Puel, who opted to join Southampton, after four years with Borussia Monchengladbach.

UNAI EMERY *(Paris Saint-Germain)*
The highly-rated Spaniard takes over from Laurent Blanc with the specific target of delivering European success. He arrives from Sevilla with three successive Europa League titles under his belt.

CHRISTIAN GOURCUFF *(Rennes)*
After coaching the Algerian national team, he is back in France with Rennes, the club that sacked him 14 years ago.

FRENCH LIGUE 1 2016-17

1	Angers	11	Metz
2	Bastia	12	Monaco
3	Bordeaux	13	Montpellier
4	Caen	14	Nancy
5	Dijon	15	Nantes
6	Guingamp	16	Nice
7	Lille	17	Paris Saint-Germain
8	Lorient	18	Rennes
9	Lyon	19	Saint-Etienne
10	Marseille	20	Toulouse

as one of France's most naturally gifted players, the winger failed to make an impression in England at Newcastle United or Hull City – a situation that was hardly helped by disciplinary issues – but regained his appetite last season with Nice and was one of Ligue 1's star performers. He's now worn the colours of the country's big three outfits – PSG, Marseille and Lyon – and it will be fascinating to see what he can add to the champions' game.

The pressure is, of course, huge and nothing less than total domestic success and a Champions League semi-final spot will satisfy the club's owners.

The big question for the rest of France's footballing elite is whether they can make any headway in shackling PSG this season. And given the early summer transfer activity, the answer would appear to be no. Far from improving their squads, most have been weakened by departures rather than strengthened by arrivals.

Lyon have lost central defender Samuel Umtiti to Barcelona for a fee of €25m, while veteran Cameroonian left-back Henri Bedimo left for Marseille. It remains to be seen if €50m-rated striker Alexandre Lacazette will still be around come the start of the season, with Arsenal, West Ham United and Atletico Madrid among the 25-year-old's admirers. The French international would be a hard man to replace and would leave coach Bruno Genesio short of firepower to mount a serious title challenge.

Marseille supporters are desperate for something to cheer about in the wake of a disastrous campaign last time out that saw them finish in a pitiful 13th place. Hopes have been raised by talk of an Iranian investment fund wanting to buy the club for €100m, with a further €500m to invest in players and infrastructure. How those long-suffering OM fans would love that kind of money to wipe the smiles off Parisian faces. Trouble is, nothing appears close to being finalised, even though current owner Margarita Louis-Dreyfus has been keen to sell since April.

Franck Passi, who stepped up to the plate when Spanish coach Michel was dismissed in April over "behaviour concerns", remains in charge at present and this general uncertainty hasn't helped the club's pre-season recruitment. They lost keeper Steve Mandanda to Crystal Palace, left-back Benjamin Mendy to Monaco, defender Nicolas Nkoulou to Lyon and Belgian striker Michy Batshuayi to Chelsea without making any marquee signings themselves. So until the club's ownership issues are resolved, there appears no chance of a Marseille revival.

After finishing third last season, Monaco have brought in full-back Djibril Sidibe from Lille as well as Mendy from Marseille, plus Polish central defender Kamil Glik from Torino. Meanwhile, the return of Colombian striker Radamel Falcao after an unhappy time in English football will be interesting if nothing else.

Elsewhere, transfer activity hasn't exactly been frenzied. Portugal striker Eder, the man branded a flop by Swansea City who scored the winning goal in the European Championship Final against France, starts his first full season with Lille. Having impressed during a loan spell that started in February, he signed a permanent deal in May. Veteran midfielder Jeremy Toulalan has signed a two-year contract with Bordeaux, moving from Monaco to join new coach Jocelyn Gourvennec, who took charge in May. And veteran midfielder Steed Malbranque has

Move...Jeremy Toulalan has joined Bordeaux

ONES TO WATCH

HATEM BEN ARFA
(Paris Saint-Germain)
Says he's come home, but the Paris native has to prove last season's 17-goal haul with Nice was no fluke. At 29, he should be at the peak of his powers.

SOFIANE BOUFAL
(Lille)
This 22-year-old midfielder attracted interest from PSG, Spurs and Internazionale last season, even though it ended early with a knee injury.

BRYAN DABO
(Saint-Etienne)
After turning heads last season for Montpellier, the 24-year-old opted to join Saint-Etienne after being impressed by coach Christophe Galtier's plans.

NABIL FEKIR
(Lyon)
Touted as a possible for France's Euro 2016 team, the talented forward suffered a bad ligament injury that saw him miss most of last season.

BILLY KETKEOPHOMPHONE
(Angers)
Born in France to parents from Laos, the 26-year-old attacking midfielder played out of his skin in Angers' excellent first season back in Ligue 1.

signed a one-year deal with Caen after his contract at Lyon ended.

Promoted Dijon have bolstered their squad with the signing of experienced midfielder Florent Balmont from Lille, while former French international Marvin Martin heads in the same direction on a year-long loan.

Fellow newcomers Metz have taken Turkish international Mevlut Erdinc, once of PSG, on another year-long loan from Hanover and, along with Ligue 2 champions Nancy, they will have few aspirations beyond top-flight survival.

Once again, then, the coming season is all about PSG. Can they make it five league titles in a row? Can they pull off another domestic clean sweep for the third time in succession? And, most importantly, can they really make Europe sit up and take notice?

It's down to the best of the rest to close the gap, of course, but it is hard to imagine anyone toppling the country's undisputed footballing powerhouse just yet.

Howard Johnson

Permanent...Euro winner Eder

TALKING POINTS

- Will the Qatari top brass at PSG be satisfied this season? Laurent Blanc swept the board of domestic trophies and still got the boot, so Unai Emery knows that nothing less than the same again, with a Champions League semi-final, will do.
- If Margarita Louis-Dreyfus finally sells Marseille, can their fans expect instant investment and improvement in order to challenge PSG? Even if they did have €500million to spend, it's unlikely they could lift the title this time.
- Prolific for Monaco in 2013 before a cruciate injury, later loan moves to Manchester United and Chelsea were disastrous, but Radamel Falcao is back in the Principality and nothing less than a spectacular season of goals will suffice.

Return...Radamel Falcao is back at Monaco

- Nice have lost Nampalys Mendy to Leicester City and Hatem Ben Arfa to PSG, as well as coach Claude Puel to Southampton. After a fourth-place finish last time out, all eyes will be on new man Lucien Favre to see if he can keep the momentum going.
- Christian Gourcuff is back in French football as coach of Rennes, where his son, Yoann, just so happens to have signed a new two-year deal. Can his old man finally get the best out of the 30-year-old who was once considered the natural successor to Zinedine Zidane?
- Toulouse escaped relegation by the skin of their teeth last season, but Wissam Ben Yedder, whose goals were vital in their Houdini act, is adamant he won't be staying. Without their prize striking asset it could be a tough campaign for coach Pascal Dupraz and TFC fans.
- Lyon finished a credible second last season despite conceding more than a goal a game. They've lost their top defender, Samuel Umtiti, to Barcelona, so it will be interesting to see if Nicolas Nkoulou from Marseille can compensate and shore things up at the back.

GRZEGORZ KRYCHOWIAK
(Paris Saint-Germain)
One of the stars of Euro 2016, the Polish defensive midfielder impressed in Spain with Sevilla. Can he now add some steel to PSG's European campaign?

STEED MALBRANQUE
(Caen)
The former Fulham, Spurs, Sunderland, Saint-Etienne and Lyon man still feels capable of turning in another season of top-class football at 36.

EMANUEL MAMMANA
(Lyon)
Capped by Argentina at senior international level before making his club debut, the 20-year-old defender joined Lyon from River Plate for €7.5m.

CHEIKH N'DOYE
(Angers)
The Senegalese midfielder took Ligue 1 by storm with promoted Angers last season, scoring goals and stealing the show with his tireless box-to-box running.

MARCO VERRATTI
(Paris Saint-Germain)
Four consecutive titles with PSG since arriving in 2012, and is still only 23, the Italian midfielder stands just 5ft 5in, but his all-round efficiency is huge.

Oct 1...Lyon v Saint-Etienne

Dec 21...Nantes v Montpellier

FIXTURES

FRIDAY, AUGUST 12, 2016

Bastia v Paris Saint-Germain
Monaco v Guingamp

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13, 2016

Bordeaux v Saint-Etienne
Caen v Lorient
Dijon v Nantes
Metz v Lille
Montpellier v Angers

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 2016

Marseille v Toulouse
Nancy v Lyon
Nice v Rennes

FRIDAY, AUGUST 19, 2016

Lyon v Caen

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 2016

Angers v Nice
Guingamp v Marseille
Lille v Dijon
Lorient v Bastia
Nantes v Monaco
Rennes v Nancy
Saint-Etienne v Montpellier
Toulouse v Bordeaux

SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 2016

Paris Saint-Germain v Metz

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27, 2016

Bordeaux v Nantes
Caen v Bastia
Dijon v Lyon
Marseille v Lorient
Metz v Angers
Montpellier v Rennes
Nancy v Guingamp
Nice v Lille
Saint-Etienne v Toulouse

SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2016

Monaco v Paris Saint-Germain

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2016

Angers v Dijon
Bastia v Toulouse
Guingamp v Montpellier
Lille v Monaco
Lorient v Nancy
Lyon v Bordeaux
Nantes v Metz
Nice v Marseille
Paris Saint-Germain v Saint-Etienne
Rennes v Caen

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2016

Bordeaux v Angers
Caen v Paris Saint-Germain
Dijon v Metz
Lorient v Lille
Marseille v Lyon
Monaco v Rennes
Montpellier v Nice
Nancy v Nantes
Saint-Etienne v Bastia
Toulouse v Guingamp

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2016

Angers v Caen
Bastia v Nancy
Guingamp v Lorient
Lille v Toulouse
Lyon v Montpellier
Metz v Bordeaux
Nantes v Saint-Etienne
Nice v Monaco
Paris Saint-Germain v Dijon
Rennes v Marseille

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2016

Bastia v Guingamp
Bordeaux v Caen
Dijon v Rennes
Lorient v Lyon
Marseille v Nantes
Monaco v Angers
Montpellier v Metz
Nancy v Nice
Saint-Etienne v Lille
Toulouse v Paris Saint-Germain

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2016

Angers v Marseille
Caen v Toulouse
Dijon v Montpellier
Lille v Nancy
Lyon v Saint-Etienne
Metz v Monaco
Nantes v Bastia
Nice v Lorient
Paris Saint-Germain v Bordeaux
Rennes v Guingamp

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2016

Bastia v Angers
Guingamp v Lille
Lorient v Nantes
Marseille v Metz
Montpellier v Caen
Nancy v Paris Saint-Germain
Nice v Lyon
Rennes v Bordeaux
Saint-Etienne v Dijon
Toulouse v Monaco

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2016

Angers v Toulouse
Bordeaux v Nancy
Caen v Saint-Etienne
Dijon v Lorient
Lille v Bastia
Lyon v Guingamp
Metz v Nice
Monaco v Montpellier
Nantes v Rennes
Paris Saint-Germain v Marseille

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2016

Bastia v Dijon
Guingamp v Angers
Lille v Paris Saint-Germain
Lorient v Montpellier
Marseille v Bordeaux
Nancy v Caen
Nice v Nantes
Rennes v Metz
Saint-Etienne v Monaco
Toulouse v Lyon

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2016

Angers v Lille
Bordeaux v Lorient
Caen v Nice
Dijon v Guingamp
Lyon v Bastia
Metz v Saint-Etienne
Monaco v Nancy
Montpellier v Marseille
Nantes v Toulouse
Paris Saint-Germain v Rennes

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2016

Bastia v Montpellier
Guingamp v Bordeaux
Lille v Lyon
Lorient v Monaco
Marseille v Caen
Nancy v Dijon
Paris Saint-Germain v Nantes
Rennes v Angers
Saint-Etienne v Nice
Toulouse v Metz

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2016

Angers v Saint-Etienne
Bordeaux v Dijon
Caen v Guingamp
Lyon v Paris Saint-Germain
Metz v Lorient
Monaco v Marseille
Montpellier v Nancy
Nantes v Lille
Nice v Bastia
Rennes v Toulouse

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016

Bastia v Bordeaux
Dijon v Monaco
Guingamp v Nice
Lille v Caen
Lorient v Rennes
Nancy v Metz
Nantes v Lyon
Paris Saint-Germain v Angers
Saint-Etienne v Marseille
Toulouse v Montpellier

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2016

Angers v Lorient
Bordeaux v Lille
Caen v Dijon
Guingamp v Nantes
Marseille v Nancy
Metz v Lyon
Monaco v Bastia
Montpellier v Paris Saint-Germain
Nice v Toulouse
Rennes v Saint-Etienne

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2016

Bastia v Metz
Bordeaux v Monaco
Dijon v Marseille
Lille v Montpellier
Lyon v Rennes
Nancy v Angers
Nantes v Caen
Paris Saint-Germain v Nice
Saint-Etienne v Guingamp
Toulouse v Lorient

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2016

Angers v Nantes
Caen v Metz
Guingamp v Paris Saint-Germain
Lorient v Saint-Etienne
Marseille v Lille
Monaco v Lyon
Montpellier v Bordeaux
Nice v Dijon
Rennes v Bastia
Toulouse v Nancy

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2016

Bastia v Marseille
Bordeaux v Nice
Dijon v Toulouse
Lille v Rennes
Lyon v Angers
Metz v Guingamp
Monaco v Caen
Nantes v Montpellier
Paris Saint-Germain v Lorient
Saint-Etienne v Nancy

Feb 25...Lille v Bordeaux

Feb 25...Marseille v Paris Saint-Germain

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2017

Angers v Bordeaux
Caen v Lyon
Lille v Saint-Etienne
Lorient v Guingamp
Marseille v Monaco
Montpellier v Dijon
Nancy v Bastia
Nice v Metz
Rennes v Paris Saint-Germain
Toulouse v Nantes

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 2017

Bastia v Nice
Bordeaux v Toulouse
Caen v Nancy
Dijon v Lille
Guingamp v Rennes
Lyon v Marseille
Metz v Montpellier
Monaco v Lorient
Nantes v Paris Saint-Germain
Saint-Etienne v Angers

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2017

Angers v Metz
Bastia v Caen
Lorient v Dijon
Lyon v Lille
Marseille v Montpellier
Nancy v Bordeaux
Nice v Guingamp
Paris Saint-Germain v Monaco
Rennes v Nantes
Toulouse v Saint-Etienne

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2017

Bordeaux v Rennes
Dijon v Paris Saint-Germain
Guingamp v Caen
Lille v Lorient
Metz v Marseille
Monaco v Nice
Montpellier v Bastia
Nantes v Nancy
Saint-Etienne v Lyon
Toulouse v Angers

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2017

Angers v Rennes
Bastia v Nantes
Caen v Bordeaux
Lorient v Toulouse
Lyon v Nancy
Marseille v Guingamp
Metz v Dijon
Montpellier v Monaco
Nice v Saint-Etienne
Paris Saint-Germain v Lille

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2017

Bordeaux v Paris Saint-Germain
Dijon v Caen
Guingamp v Lyon
Lille v Angers
Monaco v Metz
Nancy v Montpellier
Nantes v Marseille
Rennes v Nice
Saint-Etienne v Lorient
Toulouse v Bastia

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2017

Angers v Nancy
Bastia v Monaco
Bordeaux v Guingamp
Caen v Lille
Lorient v Nice
Lyon v Dijon
Marseille v Rennes
Metz v Nantes
Montpellier v Saint-Etienne
Paris Saint-Germain v Toulouse

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2017

Angers v Bastia
Guingamp v Monaco
Lille v Bordeaux
Lyon v Metz
Marseille v Paris Saint-Germain
Nancy v Toulouse
Nantes v Dijon
Nice v Montpellier
Rennes v Lorient
Saint-Etienne v Caen

SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 2017

Bastia v Saint-Etienne
Bordeaux v Lyon
Caen v Angers
Dijon v Nice
Lorient v Marseille
Metz v Rennes
Monaco v Nantes
Montpellier v Guingamp
Paris Saint-Germain v Nancy
Toulouse v Lille

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2017

Guingamp v Bastia
Lorient v Paris Saint-Germain
Lyon v Toulouse
Marseille v Angers
Monaco v Bordeaux
Montpellier v Nantes
Nancy v Lille
Nice v Caen
Rennes v Dijon
Saint-Etienne v Metz

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017

Angers v Guingamp
Bordeaux v Montpellier
Caen v Monaco
Dijon v Saint-Etienne
Lille v Marseille
Metz v Bastia
Nancy v Lorient
Nantes v Nice
Paris Saint-Germain v Lyon
Toulouse v Rennes

SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2017

Bastia v Lille
Guingamp v Nancy
Lorient v Caen
Marseille v Dijon
Metz v Paris Saint-Germain
Monaco v Saint-Etienne
Montpellier v Toulouse
Nantes v Angers
Nice v Bordeaux
Rennes v Lyon

SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2017

Angers v Monaco
Bordeaux v Metz
Caen v Montpellier
Dijon v Bastia
Lille v Nice
Lyon v Lorient
Nancy v Rennes
Paris Saint-Germain v Guingamp
Saint-Etienne v Nantes
Toulouse v Marseille

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2017

Angers v Paris Saint-Germain
Bastia v Lyon
Guingamp v Toulouse
Marseille v Saint-Etienne
Metz v Caen
Monaco v Dijon
Montpellier v Lorient
Nantes v Bordeaux
Nice v Nancy
Rennes v Lille

SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 2017

Bordeaux v Bastia
Caen v Nantes
Dijon v Angers
Lille v Guingamp
Lorient v Metz
Lyon v Monaco
Nancy v Marseille
Paris Saint-Germain v Montpellier
Saint-Etienne v Rennes
Toulouse v Nice

SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 2017

Angers v Lyon
Bastia v Rennes
Caen v Marseille
Dijon v Bordeaux
Guingamp v Saint-Etienne
Metz v Nancy
Monaco v Toulouse
Montpellier v Lille
Nantes v Lorient
Nice v Paris Saint-Germain

SATURDAY, MAY 6, 2017

Guingamp v Dijon
Lille v Metz
Lorient v Angers
Lyon v Nantes
Marseille v Nice
Nancy v Monaco
Paris Saint-Germain v Bastia
Rennes v Montpellier
Saint-Etienne v Bordeaux
Toulouse v Caen

SUNDAY, MAY 14, 2017

Bastia v Lorient
Bordeaux v Marseille
Caen v Rennes
Dijon v Nancy
Metz v Toulouse
Monaco v Lille
Montpellier v Lyon
Nantes v Guingamp
Nice v Angers
Saint-Etienne v Paris Saint-Germain

SATURDAY, MAY 20, 2017

Angers v Montpellier
Guingamp v Metz
Lille v Nantes
Lorient v Bordeaux
Lyon v Nice
Marseille v Bastia
Nancy v Saint-Etienne
Paris Saint-Germain v Caen
Rennes v Monaco
Toulouse v Dijon

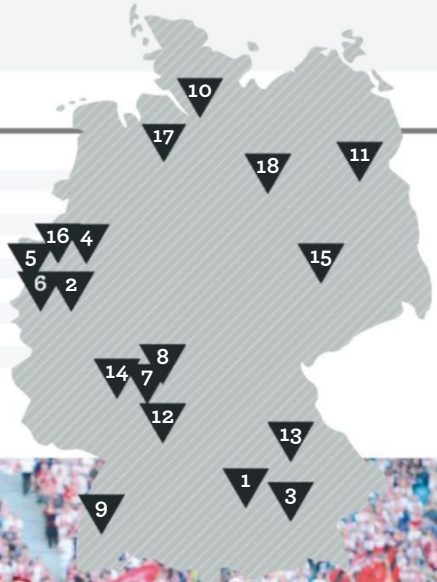
(All dates subject to change)

New coaches and major moves shake up title race

Big two...Bayern (in red) and Dortmund contest last season's Cup Final

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA 2016-17

1 Augsburg
2 Bayer Leverkusen
3 Bayern Munich
4 Borussia Dortmund
5 Borussia Monchengladbach
6 Cologne
7 Darmstadt
8 Eintracht Frankfurt
9 Freiburg
10 Hamburg
11 Hertha Berlin
12 Hoffenheim *(Sinsheim)*
13 Ingolstadt
14 Mainz
15 RB Leipzig
16 Schalke *(Gelsenkirchen)*
17 Werder Bremen
18 Wolfsburg



Unpopular...newly promoted RB Leipzig won't be the neutral fan's favourite

Working on the logical assumption that this season's title-winner will be either reigning champions Bayern Munich or last term's runners-up Borussia Dortmund, various tie-breakers could come into play – not least, which best handles a campaign of transition and upheaval.

The times they are a-changin' for both outfits. Bayern waved goodbye to coaching icon Pep Guardiola and replaced him with gentleman trophy-hunter Carlo Ancelotti. Dortmund were forced to raze and reconstruct after a whirlwind summer of comings and goings.

While Ancelotti was at pains during his first Bayern press conference to frame himself as the continuity option – "I'm not here to start a revolution" – he inevitably will bring new ideas to the table, and in terms of tactics there is likely to be quite a difference.

There will be no more three-man defence or constant changes of formation. Mindful of fitting his players to the system and not vice versa, Ancelotti teams tend to sit deeper in defence, have more of a wait-and-see approach and, in marked contrast to Guardiola, are not nearly as obsessed with ball-retention. "You can't win any match by possession alone," the pragmatic Italian once declared.

Ancelotti is, in many ways, the polar opposite of Guardiola: more laid-back, closer to his players and never treating the game as a laboratory experiment. Easy to respect and work with, yet still will need time to find his bearings and put his message across.

Six hundred kilometres north-west in Dortmund, Thomas Tuchel faces an even more complicated task with the biggest personnel refit at the Westfalenstadion in at least a decade. With three of the club's most influential players – skipper and centre-back Mats Hummels (Bayern), schemer Ilkay Gundogan (Manchester City) and attacking midfielder Henrikh Mkhitaryan (Manchester United) – all flying the coop and eight individuals checking in, a good third of the first-team squad has changed, the sort of flux most teams would want to avoid.

Most of the *Schwarz-Gelben* newcomers are overseas hot properties: Portugal left-back and Euro 2016 gold medalist Raphael Guerreiro (Lorient), sharpshooting French teenager Ousmane Dembele (Rennes); Barcelona and Spain centre-back Marc Bartra, Espanyol defensive midfielder Mikel Merino and

PROMOTED TEAMS

FREIBURG
Last season's second-tier champions are the quintessential elevator club, celebrating five promotions to the Bundesliga since 1993 but demoted four times in the same period.

RB LEIPZIG
Lavishly backed by the Red Bull energy-drink firm, they are the first eastern German side to feature in the top-flight for seven years. A fifth-tier club prior to controversially going corporate in 2009.

NEW COACHES

CARLO ANCELOTTI *(Bayern Munich)*
With his reluctance to make waves, an ability to handle big names and track-record of success, he was an obvious choice to follow Pep Guardiola.

RALPH HASENHUTTL *(RB Leipzig)*
After steering Ingolstadt from the bottom of the second tier to Bundesliga safety, he faces more pressure at the nakedly ambitious RB.

MARKUS KAUCZINSKI *(Ingolstadt)*
The only coach in the top flight with no Bundesliga technical area experience. With Karlsruhe for 15 years, working his way up from youth to first-team boss.

MARKUS WEINZIERL *(Schalke)*
One of the best young tacticans in the country, he worked wonders in his four seasons at Augsburg and now has the task of breathing life into Schalke.

DIRK SCHUSTER *(Augsburg)*
In three-and a half-years at Darmstadt, he took them on a journey that comprised two promotions and top-flight survival last term.

NORBERT MEIER *(Darmstadt)*
Prised away from second division Arminia Bielefeld, he will be taking charge of his third Bundesliga side, after Duisburg and Fortuna Dusseldorf.

winger Emre Mor from Nordsjaelland.

Tuchel admits that placing such faith in youth could be conceived as a gamble. However, he also says the club ultimately had no choice, insisting: "We've lost some world-class talent this summer. We went to our limits to keep them, but have to accept there are more attractive clubs, those who are a step ahead of us in business and financial power.

"We've decided to go forward with talent and potential. We've brought in young players with personality, desire, creativity and a sparkle in their eye. We're hoping to be surprised as to where it will all lead. It's a risky road, but are hoping it will pay off. It feels like a new beginning.

"We all have to be adaptable and come up with a new way of playing, one which gives us results and lets the youngsters express themselves."

As well as investing in next-generation ability, the *Dortmunder* also have been shopping at the top end of the market, spending €30million on Wolfsburg wide-man Andre Schurrle and another

Faith in youth... Dortmund coach Thomas Tuchel

€25m on returning prodigal son Mario Gotze, who in his three seasons at Bayern looked anything but an attacking virtuoso.

Although neither "Supermario" nor Schurrle have set the Bundesliga alight in recent times, both are class acts, each a world champion, and it would be no surprise at all if Tuchel managed to rekindle their respective flames.

The Bundesliga's top scorers last season with 82 goals, Dortmund should be confident of maintaining that type of strike rate as there is danger everywhere you look: the quick feet and vision of Gotze and Schurrle, now aligned with the incisiveness and touch of Marco Reus – who after missing Euro 2016 with a groin injury, should be operational by September at the latest – and the dead-eye finishing of leading scorer Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, who despite several attempts to lure him to the Premier League has, crucially, stayed loyal.

Of course, Bayern, champions for the past four years, are strong favourites to prevail again. They have two or three A-grade players in every position, an exceedingly safe pair of hands in Ancelotti and have not overly tinkered with a strong squad, happy only to bring in Hummels – who once was a youth-teamer in Munich – and indefatigable teenage Benfica and Portugal midfielder Renato Sanches.

Ancelotti, the winner of 16 major titles in his coaching career, including three Champions Leagues, never shouts and screams, never wields the big stick. Yet in his own quiet, understated way he always manages to get the job done and is a master in promoting harmony in groups jam-packed with superstar egos.

> "We have to accept there are more attractive clubs, those who are a step ahead of us in business and financial power"
>
> **Borussia Dortmund coach Thomas Tuchel**

Talent...Dortmund's Emre Mor (in yellow) takes on Manchester City

"I think all top coaches do good tactical work," claimed Ancelotti in an interview with *France Football* magazine late last year. "In my opinion, what makes the difference results-wise is the hunger, motivation, solidarity and collective efforts of the team. The nuance comes from the personality and psychology of the coach.

"You have a problem when the coach says 'we' and the players think 'me'. It all becomes so much easier when a player puts the collective first."

Hopes of one day emulating the Bayern-Dortmund pre-eminence are very much alive in other top-flight locations.

Schalke, determined to regain a Champions League spot after two blank campaigns, are confident their newly appointed high command of CEO Christian Heidel (ex-Mainz) and coach Markus Weinzierl (formerly with Augsburg) is the winning ticket. The early signs have been

ONES TO WATCH

JULIAN BRANDT
(Bayer Leverkusen)
Outstanding in the second half of last season, the goalscoring left-winger only missed European Championship selection by a whisker. His time will come.

OUSMANE DEMBELE
(Borussia Dortmund)
Schwarz-Gelben sporting director Michael Zorc knows how to turn on the charm, persuading the Rennes whizz-kid to choose Dortmund over Barcelona and PSG.

BREEL EMBOLO
(Schalke)
Although strongly linked with big-spending RB Leipzig, the Basle striking starlet eventually landed much further west – and at €27.5m is the most expensive signing in Schalke history.

YANNICK GERHARDT
(Wolfsburg)
Talented under-21 international midfielder who joined Wolfsburg from Cologne, he is comfortable on the ball and is especially impressive when the tempo is high.

ANDRE HAHN
(Borussia Monchengladbach)
After recovering from a serious knee injury, the right-winger was irresistible during the final few weeks of last season, combining mobility, incisiveness and goals galore.

TALKING POINTS

- While some feel Gladbach may have been fatally wounded by the sale of midfielder and captain Granit Xhaka to Arsenal, in Christoph Kramer, a €15m purchase from Leverkusen, they have found a fine replacement and all their most potent attacking weapons remain on board: Raffael, Mo Dahoud, Patrick Herrmann, Andre Hahn and Lars Stindl.
- With skipper Mats Hummels quitting Dortmund for Bayern, the word is that Marco Reus will take over the armband – a rather curious choice given the forward's poor injury record.
- With Dirk Schuster having left for Augsburg, can Darmstadt survive under new boss Norbert Meier? He won't be helped by the departure of striker Sandro Wagner and the left-sided combo of Konstantin Rausch and Tobias Kempe.
- After coming on strong in the second-half of last season under new coach Julian Nagelsmann, Hoffenheim could be worth watching this term.
- No other Bundesliga star will have more to prove in the months ahead than Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski who, after topping the league's scoring charts last season, had a disappointing Euro finals with Poland.

Good deal...Mathenia

- Having won eight of their last nine games, and with key Chilean midfielder Charles Aranguiz now fully fit, Leverkusen could go well, having added international striker Kevin Volland and busy Mainz midfield holder Julian Baumgartlinger to their squad.
- Given the organisational skills of new coach Ralph Hasenhuttl, RB Leipzig should survive without too many problems, but Freiburg might find it tougher.
- The €800,000 Hamburg paid Darmstadt for young keeper Christian Mathenia looks like a good deal, as does Wolfsburg's loan move for Real Madrid's Borja Mayoral.

promising, with Weinzierl impressing with his down-to-earth character, enthusiasm and communication skills, and Heidel excelling in the transfer market, especially in his successful swoops for Basle and Switzerland striker Breel Embolo and battle-hardened Brazilian central defender, Naldo, who was a gift-wrapped free transfer from Wolfsburg.

Heidel says that one of his top priorities is to rid the Royal Blues of their long-standing tradition for internal wrangling, for turning drama into a crisis. If he is true to his word, the Gelsenkirchener could be in business.

Another club fizzing with ambition are top-flight new boys RB Leipzig, one of the footballing branches of the Red Bull soft-drink empire. And for many fans around the country, they are therefore the antithesis of what the game should be: corporate, synthetic and soulless; a mirror image of the German League's famous "50+1" rule, where club members hold the controlling stake.

But like it or not, RB probably are here to stay, and for all their financial muscle, there has been an organic element to their development, invariably preferring to buy young tyros rather than veterans with little left to prove. Typically, all their signings this summer are "works in progress", fine prospects such as dynamic midfielder Naby Keita and versatile defender, Benno Schmitz – both from sister outfit Red Bull Salzburg in Austria – and talented Stuttgart forward Timo Werner.

Winner...Bayern's Carlo Ancelotti

RB Leipzig sporting director Ralf Rangnick – who last season led them to the promised land as coach before handing over the reins to ex-Ingolstadt boss Ralph Hasenhuttl – is not putting the cart before the horse. His goal is to stay out of the relegation zone, then to take it from there, hopefully qualifying for Europe a couple of years down the line.

Who knows if they will be able to break up the established order. But it's going to be fun watching them try.

Nick Bidwell

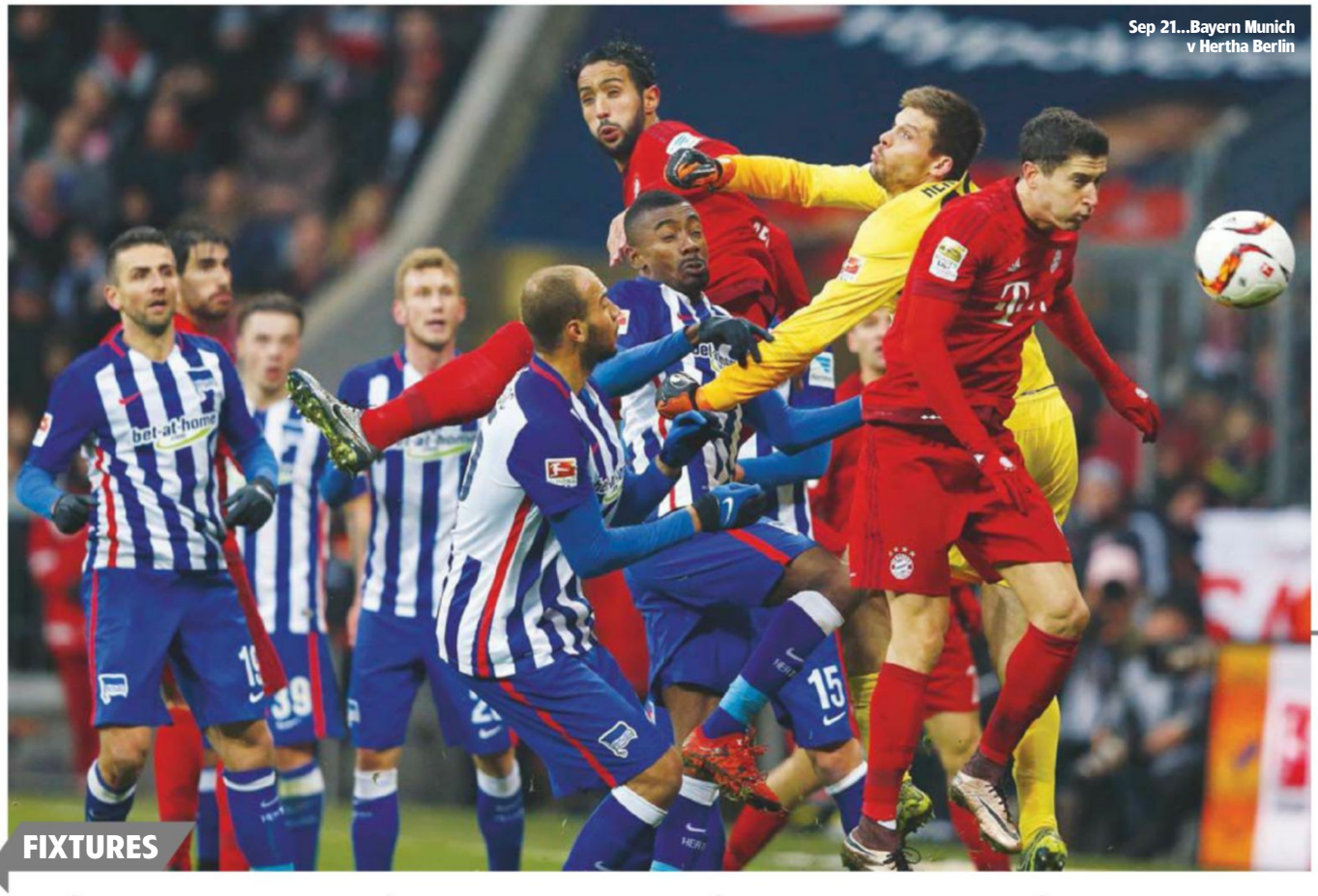
KOO JA-CHEOL
(Augsburg)
The South Korean attacking midfielder is FCA's trump card: sprightly, flexible, creative and sharp in front of goal. He hit a memorable hat-trick against Leverkusen last spring.

NABY KEITA
(RB Leipzig)
On the radar of many leading European clubs, the 21-year-old midfielder swapped Salzburg for stable mates Leipzig. Now fit again after contracting malaria in January.

NILS PETERSEN
(Freiburg)
One of an increasingly rare breed in Germany, a genuine centre-forward, he scored 21 goals in the second division last term and was rewarded with a spot in the Olympic squad.

RENATO SANCHES
(Bayern Munich)
Deservedly named the Young Player of Euro 2016 as Portugal lifted the trophy, the €35m that Bayern shelled out for the all-action midfielder could turn out to be a bargain.

NIKLAS SULE
(Hoffenheim)
The German under-21 and Olympic centre-back is quick, strong and tenacious. Equally impressive for a defender, he rarely finds himself in the bad books of referees.



Sep 21...Bayern Munich v Hertha Berlin

FIXTURES

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26, 2016

Bayern Munich v Werder Bremen

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27, 2016

Augsburg v Wolfsburg
Bor Dortmd v Mainz
Bor M'gladbach v Bayer Levkn
Cologne v Darmstadt
Eintracht Frankfurt v Schalke
Hamburg v Ingolstadt

SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2016

Hertha Berlin v Freiburg
Hoffenheim v RB Leipzig

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2016

Schalke v Bayern Munich

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2016

Bayer Levkn v Hamburg
Darmstadt v Eintracht Frankfurt
Freiburg v Bor M'gladbach
Ingolstadt v Hertha Berlin
RB Leipzig v Bor Dortmd
Wolfsburg v Cologne

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2016

Mainz v Hoffenheim
Werder Bremen v Augsburg

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2016

Cologne v Freiburg

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2016

Bayern Munich v Ingolstadt
Bor Dortmd v Darmstadt
Bor M'gladbach v Werder Bremen
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayer Levkn
Hamburg v RB Leipzig
Hoffenheim v Wolfsburg

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2016

Augsburg v Mainz
Hertha Berlin v Schalke

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2016

Darmstadt v Hoffenheim
Freiburg v Hamburg
Ingolstadt v Eintracht Frankfurt
Wolfsburg v Bor Dortmd

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2016

Bayer Levkn v Augsburg
Bayern Munich v Hertha Berlin
RB Leipzig v Bor M'gladbach
Schalke v Cologne
Werder Bremen v Mainz

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2016

Bor Dortmd v Freiburg

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2016

Augsburg v Darmstadt
Bor M'gladbach v Ingolstadt
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hertha Berlin
Hamburg v Bayern Munich
Mainz v Bayer Levkn
Werder Bremen v Wolfsburg

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2016

Cologne v RB Leipzig
Hoffenheim v Schalke

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2016

Bayer Levkn v Bor Dortmd
Bayern Munich v Cologne
Darmstadt v Werder Bremen
Freiburg v Eintracht Frankfurt
Hertha Berlin v Hamburg
Ingolstadt v Hoffenheim
RB Leipzig v Augsburg
Schalke v Bor M'gladbach
Wolfsburg v Mainz

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2016

Augsburg v Schalke
Bor Dortmd v Hertha Berlin
Bor M'gladbach v Hamburg
Cologne v Ingolstadt
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayern Munich
Hoffenheim v Freiburg
Mainz v Darmstadt
Werder Bremen v Bayer Levkn
Wolfsburg v RB Leipzig

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2016

Bayer Levkn v Hoffenheim
Bayern Munich v Bor M'gladbach
Darmstadt v Wolfsburg
Freiburg v Augsburg
Hamburg v Eintracht Frankfurt
Hertha Berlin v Cologne
Ingolstadt v Bor Dortmd
RB Leipzig v Werder Bremen
Schalke v Mainz

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2016

Augsburg v Bayern Munich
Bor Dortmd v Schalke
Bor M'gladbach v Eintracht Frankfurt
Cologne v Hamburg
Darmstadt v RB Leipzig
Hoffenheim v Hertha Berlin
Mainz v Ingolstadt
Werder Bremen v Freiburg
Wolfsburg v Bayer Levkn

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2016

Bayer Levkn v Darmstadt
Bayern Munich v Hoffenheim
Eintracht Frankfurt v Cologne
Freiburg v Wolfsburg
Hamburg v Bor Dortmd
Hertha Berlin v Bor M'gladbach
Ingolstadt v Augsburg
RB Leipzig v Mainz
Schalke v Werder Bremen

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2016

Augsburg v Hertha Berlin
Bayer Levkn v RB Leipzig
Bor Dortmd v Bayern Munich
Bor M'gladbach v Cologne
Darmstadt v Ingolstadt
Hoffenheim v Hamburg
Mainz v Freiburg
Werder Bremen v Eintracht Frankfurt
Wolfsburg v chalke

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2016

Bayern Munich v Bayer Levkn
Bor M'gladbac v Hoffenheim
Cologne v Augsburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bor Dortmd
Freiburg v RB Leipzig
Hamburg v Werder Bremen
Hertha Berlin v Mainz
Ingolstadt v Wolfsburg
Schalke v Darmstadt

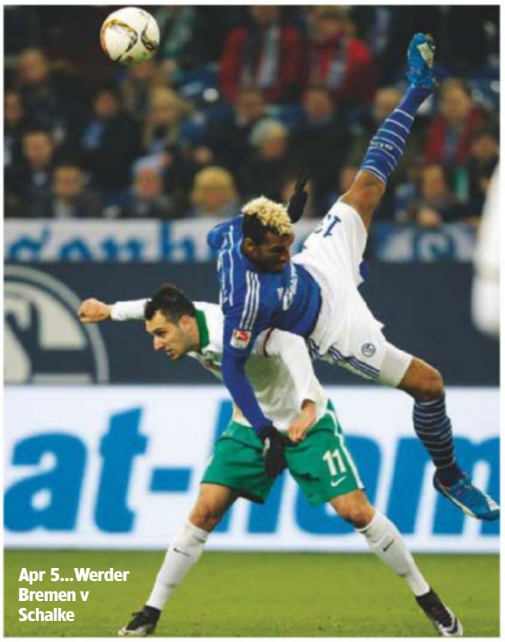
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2016

Augsburg v Eintracht Frankfurt
Bayer Levkn v Freiburg
Bor Dortmd v Bor M'gladbach
Darmstadt v Hamburg
Hoffenheim v Cologne
Mainz v Bayern Munich
RB Leipzig v chalke
Werder Bremen v Ingolstadt
Wolfsburg v Hertha Berlin

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2016

Bayern Munich v Wolfsburg
Bor M'gladbach v Mainz
Cologne v Bor Dortmd
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hoffenheim
Freiburg v Darmstadt
Hamburg v Augsburg
Hertha Berlin v Werder Bremen
Ingolstadt v RB Leipzig
Schalke v Bayer Levkn

Jan 28...Bayer Leverkusen v Borussia Monchengladbach



Apr 5...Werder Bremen v Schalke

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2016

Augsburg v Bor M'gladbach
Bayer Levkn v Ingolstadt
Darmstadt v Bayern Munich
Hoffenheim v Bor Dortmd
Mainz v Hamburg
RB Leipzig v Hertha Berlin
Schalke v Freiburg
Werder Bremen v Cologne
Wolfsburg v Eintracht Frankfurt

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2016

Bayern Munich v RB Leipzig
Bor Dortmd v Augsburg
Bor M'gladbach v Wolfsburg
Cologne v Bayer Levkn
Eintracht Frankfurt v Mainz
Hamburg v Schalke
Hertha Berlin v Darmstadt
Hoffenheim v Werder Bremen
Ingolstadt v Freiburg

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 2017

Augsburg v Hoffenheim
Bayer Levkn v Hertha Berlin
Darmstadt v Bor M'gladbach
Freiburg v Bayern Munich
Mainz v Cologne
RB Leipzig v Eintracht Frankfurt
Schalke v Ingolstadt
Werder Bremen v Bor Dortmd
Wolfsburg v Hamburg

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2017

Bayer Levkn v Bor M'gladbach
Darmstadt v Cologne
Freiburg v Hertha Berlin
Ingolstadt v Hamburg
Mainz v Bor Dortmd
RB Leipzig v Hoffenheim
Schalke v Eintracht Frankfurt
Werder Bremen v Bayern Munich
Wolfsburg v Augsburg

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2017

Augsburg v Werder Bremen
Bayern Munich v Schalke
Bor Dortmd v RB Leipzig
Bor M'gladbach v Freiburg
Cologne v Wolfsburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Darmstadt
Hamburg v Bayer Levkn
Hertha Berlin v Ingolstadt
Hoffenheim v Mainz

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2017

Bayer Levkn v Eintracht Frankfurt
Darmstadt v Bor Dortmd
Freibur v Cologne
Ingolstadt v Bayern Munich
Mainz v Augsburg
RB Leipzig v Hamburg
Schalke v Hertha Berlin
Werder Bremen v Bor M'gladbach
Wolfsburg v Hoffenheim

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2017

Augsburg v Bayer Levkn
Bor Dortmd v Wolfsburg
Bor M'gladbach v RB Leipzig
Cologne v Schalke
Eintracht Frankfurt v Ingolstadt
Hamburg v Freiburg
Hertha Berlin v Bayern Munich
Hoffenheim v Darmstadt
Mainz v Werder Bremen

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2017

Bayer Levkn v Mainz
Bayern Munich v Hamburg
Darmstadt v Augsburg
Freiburg v Bor Dortmd
Hertha Berlin v Eintracht Frankfurt
Ingolstadt v Bor M'gladbach
RB Leipzig v Cologne
Schalke v Hoffenheim
Wolfsburg v Werder Bremen

SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 2017

Augsburg v RB Leipzig
Bor Dortmd v Bayer Levkn
Bor M'gladbach v Schalke
Cologne v Bayern Munich
Eintracht Frankfurt v Freiburg
Hamburg v Hertha Berlin
Hoffenheim v Ingolstadt
Mainz v Wolfsburg
Werder Bremen v Darmstadt

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2017

Bayer Levkn v Werder Bremen
Bayern Munich v Eintracht Frankfurt
Darmstadt v Mainz
Freiburg v Hoffenheim
Hamburg v Bor M'gladbach
Hertha Berlin v Bor Dortmd
Ingolstadt v Cologne
RB Leipzig v Wolfsburg
Schalke v Augsburg

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017

Augsburg v Freiburg
Bor Dortmd v Ingolstadt
Bor M'gladbach v Bayern Munich
Cologne v Hertha Berlin
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hamburg
Hoffenheim v Bayer Levkn
Mainz v Schalke
Werder Bremen v RB Leipzig
Wolfsburg v Darmstadt

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

Bayer Levkn v Wolfsburg
Bayern Munich v Augsburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bor M'gladbach
Freiburg v Werder Bremen
Hamburg v Cologne
Hertha Berlin v Hoffenheim
Ingolstadt v Mainz
RB Leipzig v Darmstadt
Schalke v Bor Dortmd

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2017

Augsburg v Ingolstadt
Bor Dortmd v Hamburg
Bor M'gladbach v Hertha Berlin
Cologne v Eintracht Frankfurt
Darmstadt v Bayer Levkn
Hoffenheim v Bayern Munich
Mainz v RB Leipzig
Werder Bremen v Schalke
Wolfsburg v Freiburg

SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2017

Bayern Munich v Bor Dortmd
Cologne v Bor M'gladbach
Eintracht Frankfurt v Werder Bremen
Freiburg v Mainz
Hamburg v Hoffenheim
Hertha Berlin v Augsburg
Ingolstadt v Darmstadt
RB Leipzig v Bayer Levkn
Schalke v Wolfsburg

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2017

Augsburg v Cologne
Bayer Levkn v Bayern Munich
Bor Dortmd v Eintracht Frankfurt
Darmstadt v Schalke
Hoffenheim v Bor M'gladbach
Mainz v Hertha Berlin
RB Leipzig v Freiburg
Werder Bremen v Hamburg
Wolfsburg v Ingolstadt

SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 2017

Bayern Munich v Mainz
Bor M'gladbach v Bor Dortmd
Cologne v Hoffenheim
Eintracht Frankfurt v Augsburg
Freiburg v Bayer Levkn
Hamburg v Darmstadt
Hertha Berlin v Wolfsburg
Ingolstadt v Werder Bremen
Schalke v RB Leipzig

SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 2017

Augsburg v Hamburg
Bayer Levkn v Schalke
Bor Dortmd v Cologne
Darmstadt v Freiburg
Hoffenheim v Eintracht Frankfurt
Mainz v Bor M'gladbach
RB Leipzig v Ingolstadt
Werder Bremen v Hertha Berlin
Wolfsburg v Bayern Munich

SATURDAY, MAY 6, 2017

Bayern Munich v Darmstadt
Bor Dortmd v Hoffenheim
Bor M'gladbach v Augsburg
Cologne v Werder Bremen
Eintracht Frankfurt v Wolfsburg
Freiburg v Schalke
Hamburg v Mainz
Hertha Berlin v RB Leipzig
Ingolstadt v Bayer Levkn

SATURDAY, MAY 13, 2017

Augsburg v Bor Dortmd
Bayer Levkn v Cologne
Darmstadt v Hertha Berlin
Freiburg v Ingolstadt
Mainz v Eintracht Frankfurt
RB Leipzig v Bayern Munich
Schalke v Hamburg
Werder Bremen v Hoffenheim
Wolfsburg v Bor M'gladbach

SATURDAY, MAY 20, 2017

Bayern Munich v Freiburg
Bor Dortmd v Werder Bremen
Bor M'gladbach v Darmstadt
Eintracht Frankfurt v RB Leipzig
Cologne v Mainz
Hamburg v Wolfsburg
Hertha Berlin v Bayer Levkn
Hoffenheim v Augsburg
Ingolstadt v Schalke

(All dates subject to change)

Can anyone stop Olympiakos?

The continuing financial crunch in Greece has forced clubs to keep signings to a minimum as they try to keep pace with perennial favourites Olympiakos.

Having won the title with six games to spare and a 30-point advantage over second-place Panathinaikos, Olympiakos' Portuguese coach Marco Silva resigned unexpectedly during the summer and was replaced by Victor Sanchez, who was in charge of Deportivo La Coruna last term.

Assistant to Michel from 2013 to 2014, the Spaniard knows the club well and is fully aware of what is expected as the club chase their 19th Greek title in 21 years.

"We are very pleased with all the players we found in the roster once we arrived," says Sanchez. "We see they are really into it, they are eager to work and this is very important so we can also keep up with our work.

"The primary message we conveyed to the players was that the team stands above all. One should first cater for the team and then for oneself."

He inherits a team who set a European record for the 21st century last term with 17 straight domestic wins, but says he will not be afraid to change the style of play.

"We will train hard, so we are ready to either press them high, be more patient in the midfield or defend behind the ball," continues Sanchez. "All these may happen in the course of a single match and have to do with the way we defend.

"Our main formation will be 4-4-2, but having said that, we may proceed with changes because every match will be different."

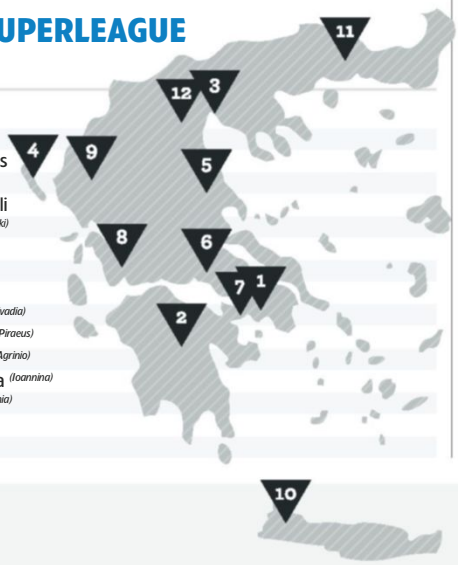
Having lost keeper Roberto, who returned to Spain and joined Espanyol, Sanchez has brought in Nicola Leali on loan from Juventus as a replacement, and added two defenders in Alberto De la Bella, on loan from Real Sociedad, and Diogo Figueiras from Sevilla. To help on the technical side, former French midfielder Francois Modesto has returned as a member of the backroom staff.

Olympiakos were only denied a fourth domestic double in five years by AEK, who beat them 2-1 in the Greek Cup Final. And Vangelis Aslanidis, who is president of the Athens club, is crystal clear on his hopes for this campaign, stating: "All AEK wants is a clean championship. Nothing else."

AEK were one of a number of teams who complained about the officiating last

Cup winners...AEK

GREEK SUPERLEAGUE 2016-17



1 AEK *(Athens)*
Atromitos
Panathinaikos
Panionios
2 Asteras Tripoli
3 Iraklis *(Thessaloniki)*
PAOK
4 Kerkyra *(Corfu)*
5 Larissa
6 Levadiakos *(Livadia)*
7 Olympiakos *(Piraeus)*
8 Panetolikos *(Agrinio)*
9 PAS Giannina *(Ioannina)*
10 Platanias *(Chania)*
11 Xanthi
12 Veria

season and even threatened a boycott if the country's football federation did not meet their demands for wholesale change. "AEK supports the movement of 12 clubs and considers the proposals as a one-way path for a new day which finally must dawn in Greek soccer. Who can say no to the obvious?" read a club statement.

The proposals include the hiring of professional referees, with the club adding: "AEK believes a fresh start is needed in Greek soccer so it can emerge from its current coma and again attract fans to the stadiums. Today it is a current state of complete unreliability and corruption."

AEK have a new coach in Temuri Ketsbaia, a 48-year-old Georgian native and former Newcastle United midfielder who played over 80 Greek league games for the club, and he has brought in veteran Portuguese forward Hugo Almeida, Uruguayan defender Juan Manuel Diaz, Ukraine defender Dmytro Chygrynskiy and Argentinian midfielder Patito Rodriguez.

Aggression... Panathinaikos' Marcus Berg

Panathinaikos, who installed former Brazil midfielder Gilberto Silva as technical director, have picked up Ghanaian striker Wakaso Mubarak, Argentinian-born Italian midfielder Cristian Ledesma, Portuguese defender Nuno Reis, Swedish defender Niklas Hult and Bulgarian international defender Ivan Ivanov.

Italian coach Andrea Stramaccioni, who put the players through double training sessions in pre-season, says: "I feel more comfortable with the mentality of the league and I have adapted. To say that Panathinaikos is a great club is one thing. We have to prove it. We have to play aggressive."

PAOK's owner is Ivan Savvidis, a Greek-Russian, and his club's website is now available in Russian, as well as Greek and English. He also wants Russian players to join PAOK so they can prove themselves and go on to play for the national side.

Even if these Russian reinforcements are not forthcoming, PAOK's Serbian coach Vladimir Ivic believes his side can challenge this term.

"I have faith in my team and we will prepare in order to be ready for the start of the league," says Ivic.

Lou Economopoulos

Competitive... Olympiakos' Manuel Da Costa (in white)

KEY DATES
The regular season starts on August 20 and will finish on April 30, followed by European play-off games. Early games include Olympiakos v AEK (6th week) and Olympiakos v PAOK (8th week).

TALKING POINTS

- The Superleague rejected a proposal from NOVA cable television to include the top-placed team in a post-season play-off and for four teams to be relegated so the 2017-18 season would consist of just 14 teams. NOVA also wanted 12 teams for the 2018-19 campaign. However, the league ruled that this season the play-offs will be for positions two to five, which lead to European spots, and two teams will be relegated, as in the previous campaign.
- PAOK will start the season on minus three points due to crowd violence last season, while Panathinaikos and Panionios will play their opening home matches without spectators for the same reason.

Trouble...Panathinaikos

ONES TO WATCH

ALAN PULIDO *(Olympiakos)*
The Mexican striker, who was a victim of a kidnapping in his homeland, is set to play a key role for the defending champions.

HUGO ALMEIDA *(AEK)*
The 31-year-old Portuguese striker has had an extensive career in Europe and says he will help AEK have a decent European run.

LIONEL ZOUMA *(Asteras Tripoli)*
The younger brother of France and Chelsea defender Kurt Zouma says he sees Asteras "as a major step in my career".

CRISTIAN LEDESMA *(Panathinaikos)*
The 33-year-old midfielder brings nine years of experience at Lazio in Italy to the Athens club.

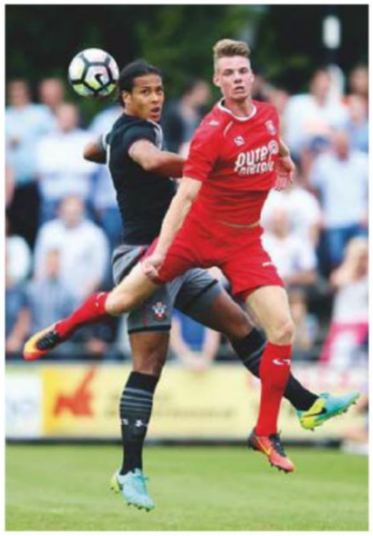
JOSE ANGEL CRESPO *(PAOK)*
Has played in Spain, England and Italy, and is expected to plug a defence that let the Thessaloniki club down last season.

Germans have transfer appeal for Dutch clubs

Sometimes you don't see what's right in front of you. For decades, Dutch clubs have neglected the Bundesliga for contracting new players – but that has changed this year with no fewer than eight clubs having German players on their books, and a German coach, Peter Hyballa, at NEC.

In the past, Dutch clubs have always looked to sign Scandinavians (Soren Lerby, Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Jon Dahl Tomasson) and South Americans (Romario, Ronaldo and Luis Suarez), while sizeable parts of the Belgian national team had their football education in Holland.

This year the focus is on the other neighbouring country, although it has to be said that the majority come from



Woes...Jari Oosterwijk (in red) of troubled Twente

Bundesliga 2 clubs, and some from clubs that were relegated to the third tier. That's a painful indicator how far the standard of the Eredivisie has dropped over the years, with talented Dutch players moving abroad at an ever younger age.

However, there are two exceptions. Daniel Schwaab left Stuttgart to replace Jeffrey Bruma at PSV, while Heiko Westermann moved to Ajax from Hamburg. A 32-year-old central defender, Westermann is a former German international, but he will want to avoid the fate that befell John Heitinga last season. Returning from Hertha Berlin, the former Dutch international thought he could still play an important role, but Frank De Boer didn't need him and a disillusioned ▸

In command...Davy Klaassen of Ajax takes charge

DUTCH EREDIVISIE 2016-17

1 Ajax *(Amsterdam)*
2 AZ *(Alkmaar)*
3 Den Haag *(The Hague)*
4 Excelsior *(Rotterdam)*
Feyenoord
Sparta
5 Go Ahead Eagles *(Deventer)*
6 Groningen
7 Heerenveen
8 Heracles *(Almelo)*
9 NEC *(Nijmegen)*
10 PEC Zwolle
11 PSV *(Eindhoven)*
12 Roda JC *(Kerkrade)*
13 Twente *(Enschede)*
14 Utrecht
15 Vitesse *(Arnhem)*
16 Willem II *(Tilburg)*

PROMOTED TEAMS

SPARTA ROTTERDAM
Holland's oldest professional club and second-tier winners are back after a six-year absence.

GO AHEAD EAGLES
Returning to the Eredivisie after a year away, the Deventer club surprisingly won the play-offs, relegating De Graafschap.

NEW COACHES

ZELJKO PETROVIC *(Den Haag)*
Former Yugoslav international who has coached all over the world but in the Eredivisie for the first time.

ERNEST FABER *(Groningen)*
Former PSV defender who led promoted NEC to 10th last time out but left over what he felt was their lack of ambition.

MITCHELL VAN DER GAAG *(Excelsior)*
Former PSV defender who played and coached in Portugal for a long time.

ERWIN VAN DE LOOI *(Willem II)*
Former Vitesse defender who led Groningen to the play-offs before joining a much weaker club.

PETER HYBALLA *(NEC)*
Son of a German father and a Dutch mother whose last job was with Bayer Leverkusen under-19s.

YANNIS ANASTASIOU *(RODA JC)*
Former Ajax striker who returns from his home country Greece. Had a year as an Ajax youth coach.

JURGEN STREPPEL *(Heerenveen)*
Former Willem II coach who achieved good results despite limited options. Must now show he can do it at a higher level.

Fresh...Ajax players at a pre-season camp

Heitinga retired during the season.

Another one who should be watching his back is Peter Bosz, the former Vitesse coach who needs to hit the ground running at Ajax. Unlike his predecessor De Boer, he hasn't come through the club's ranks and prefers a risky – some would say suicidal – attacking game that could leave the club empty-handed. Bosz was praised for this type of football at Vitesse but he didn't win any silverware in Arnhem, despite close co-operation with Chelsea. Bosz cannot afford a trophyless season, or an early Champions League elimination.

To help him, Ajax have signed two Colombians in defender Davinson Sanchez from Atletico Nacional and Deportivo Cali attacker Mateo Cassierra, and this recent focus on South America isn't surprising, considering that their new chief scout Henk Veldmate was responsible for the arrival of Luis Suarez at Groningen.

While Ajax are still trying to adapt to the post-De Boer era, after winning four national titles in six years, PSV and Feyenoord could take advantage.

Both teams have hardly been affected by transfers. Title-holders PSV will again rely on Luuk De Jong's goals and Andres Guardado's astute midfield play, while coach Phillip Cocu hopes to add Marco Van Ginkel, who was on loan from Chelsea last year, to his squad permanently.

Meanwhile, in Rotterdam there are also hopeful signs. No key player has left, inspirational 36-year old Dirk Kuyt will give it all for another season and Tonny Vilhena, who at first refused a new contract, also stays. On top of that, Feyenoord seem to have a prolific goalscorer in Nicolai Jorgensen. Even the huge setback of Kenneth Vermeer being ruled out for at least six months with an achilles-tendon rupture won't be a problem as Australian keeper Brad Jones, a former Liverpool and NEC player, is a worthy replacement.

Finally, an embarrassing soap opera has come to a happy end for Twente. Despite being guilty of financial irregularities and deliberately misleading the football authorities, a successful appeal means the Enschede club regained their top-flight licence and the punishment of forced relegation has been scrapped. Instead, they have to pay a €180,000 fine.

The club isn't entirely off the hook just yet though, as drastic economies are still needed if they want to retain their licence. A big fee for leading player Hakim Ziyech, who has been over-particular in picking a new club, would certainly help. Only 10km from the border, Twente – who already have three Germans in their squad – are likely to follow other clubs' examples in finding a suitable replacement.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Reliable...PSV will count on Luuk De Jong's goals

TALKING POINTS

- Lacking the DNA of Ajax and succeeding club icon Frank De Boer will be tough for Peter Bosz. And after a far from impressive pre-season, will he be given enough time to implement his football ideas in Amsterdam?
- Is there life at AZ after the departure of Vincent Janssen to Tottenham Hotspur The Alkmaar club have signed Wout Weghorst from Heracles and Fred Friday of Norway's Lillestrom to deliver goals.
- PSV were on the brink of the Champions League quarter-finals last season but lost on penalties to Atletico Madrid. A repeat would be more than welcome for troubled Dutch football.
- Last season, unfancied Heracles took fifth spot. Will there be another surprise package this time round?
- Feyenoord fans believe that in striker Nicolai Jorgensen the club has found the missing link to clinch the title for the first time since 1999.
- Donny Van de Beek and Abdelhak Nouri (both Ajax), Jari Schuurman (PEC) and Dennis Van der Heijden (Den Haag) are set to pave the way for a new generation of Dutch talent.

Out...PSV lose to Atletico

ONES TO WATCH

MATEO CASSIERRA *(Ajax)*
Colombian striker who can also play as a winger. Once settled, he could be a pleasant surprise.

ANDRES GUARDADO *(PSV)*
Arguably the best player in the Eredivisie. His astute play and experience will be vital.

DIRK KUYT *(Feyenoord)*
Still going strong at 36, he represents everything that a Feyenoord fan wants and no one hopes this is a farewell tour.

HEIKO WESTERMANN *(Ajax)*
Experienced defender who has taken a risk by joining Ajax and it will be interesting to see how he adapts.

RIECHEDLY BAZOER *(Ajax)*
Physically strong midfielder who will probably move to a big league at the end of the season.

ILIASS BEN HASSANI *(Heracles)*
Dutch-Moroccan midfielder in the Hakim Ziyech mould. Played an important role in Heracles' rise.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 5, 2016
NEC v PEC Zwolle

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6, 2016
Den Haag v GA Eagles
Twente v Excelsior
Utrecht v PSV
Willem II v Vitesse

SUNDAY, AUGUST 7, 2016
AZ v Heerenveen
Groningen v Feyenoord
Roda JC v Heracles
Sparta v Ajax

FRIDAY, AUGUST 12, 2016
Heerenveen v Utrecht

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13, 2016
Ajax v Roda JC
Excelsior v Groningen
PEC Zwolle v Sparta
Vitesse v Den Haag

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 2016
Feyenoord v Twente
GA Eagles v NEC
Heracles v Willem II
PSV v AZ

FRIDAY, AUGUST 19, 2016
Excelsior v Den Haag

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 2016
Ajax v Willem II
NEC v Heerenveen
PEC Zwolle v PSV
Roda JC v Vitesse

SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 2016
Groningen v Twente
Heracles v Feyenoord
Sparta v GA Eagles
Utrecht v AZ

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26, 2016
Vitesse v Utrecht

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27, 2016
Feyenoord v Excelsior
Heerenveen v PEC Zwolle
Twente v Sparta
Willem II v Roda JC

SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2016
AZ v NEC
Den Haag v Heracles
GA Eagles v Ajax
PSV v Groningen

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2016
Ajax v Vitesse
AZ v Willem II
Excelsior v Heracles
Heerenveen v Twente
NEC v PSV

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2016
Feyenoord v Den Haag
GA Eagles v Roda JC
Groningen v Sparta
PEC Zwolle v Utrecht

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2016
Utrecht v Groningen

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2016
Roda JC v Heerenveen
Twente v Den Haag
Vitesse v GA Eagles
Willem II v Excelsior

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2016
Heracles v Ajax
PEC Zwolle v AZ
PSV v Feyenoord
Sparta v NEC

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2016
Ajax v PEC Zwolle
AZ v GA Eagles
Den Haag v Heerenveen
Excelsior v PSV
Groningen v Heracles

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2016
Feyenoord v Roda JC
NEC v Willem II
Twente v Vitesse
Utrecht v Sparta

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2016
PEC Zwolle v Den Haag

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2016
GA Eagles v Excelsior
Heerenveen v PSV
Roda JC v NEC
Vitesse v Groningen

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2016
Ajax v Utrecht
Heracles v Twente
Sparta v AZ
Willem II v Feyenoord

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2016
AZ v Vitesse
Den Haag v Ajax
PSV v Heracles
Sparta v Willem II
Utrecht v GA Eagles

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2016
Excelsior v Roda JC
Groningen v Heerenveen
NEC v Feyenoord
Twente v PEC Zwolle

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2016
Excelsior v PEC Zwolle

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2016
GA Eagles v Twente
PSV v Sparta
Roda JC v Den Haag
Willem II v Utrecht

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2016
Feyenoord v Ajax
Groningen v AZ
Heerenveen v Heracles
NEC v Vitesse

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2016
Twente v Roda JC

SATURDAY 29TH OCTOBER 2016
Ajax v Excelsior
Heracles v Sparta
Vitesse v PSV
Willem II v Groningen

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2016
Den Haag v AZ
Feyenoord v Heerenveen
PEC Zwolle v GA Eagles
Utrecht v NEC

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2016
Sparta v Heerenveen

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2016
Den Haag v Willem II
NEC v Groningen
PEC Zwolle v Roda JC
PSV v Twente

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2016
AZ v Ajax
GA Eagles v Feyenoord
Utrecht v Excelsior
Vitesse v Heracles

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2016
Ajax v NEC
Excelsior v Sparta
Heerenveen v Vitesse
Heracles v GA Eagles
Willem II v PSV

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2016
Feyenoord v PEC Zwolle
Groningen v Den Haag
Roda JC v AZ
Twente v Utrecht

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2016
GA Eagles v Willem II

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2016
NEC v Twente
PEC Zwolle v Groningen
PSV v Den Haag
Vitesse v Excelsior

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2016
AZ v Heracles
Heerenveen v Ajax
Sparta v Roda JC
Utrecht v Feyenoord

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2016
Heracles v NEC

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2016
Ajax v Groningen
Excelsior v AZ
GA Eagles v Heerenveen
Roda JC v PSV

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016
Den Haag v Utrecht
Feyenoord v Sparta
Vitesse v PEC Zwolle
Willem II v Twente

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2016
Groningen v Roda JC

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2016
Heerenveen v Excelsior
NEC v Den Haag
PEC Zwolle v Willem II
PSV v GA Eagles

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2016
AZ v Feyenoord
Sparta v Vitesse
Twente v Ajax
Utrecht v Heracles

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2016
Willem II v Heerenveen

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2016
Den Haag v Sparta
Feyenoord v Vitesse
Heracles v PEC Zwolle
Roda JC v Utrecht

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2016
Ajax v PSV
Excelsior v NEC
Groningen v GA Eagles
Twente v AZ

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13, 2017
GA Eagles v AZ

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2017
Heerenveen v Den Haag
Heracles v Groningen
PSV v Excelsior
Sparta v Utrecht

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2017
PEC Zwolle v Ajax
Roda JC v Feyenoord
Vitesse v Twente
Willem II v NEC

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 2017
Twente v Heracles

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 2017
AZ v Sparta
Den Haag v PEC Zwolle
Feyenoord v Willem II
Groningen v Vitesse

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2017
Excelsior v GA Eagles
NEC v Roda JC
PSV v Heerenveen
Utrecht v Ajax

FRIDAY, JANUARY 27, 2017
Willem II v Sparta

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2017
GA Eagles v Utrecht
Heracles v PSV
Roda JC v Excelsior
Vitesse v AZ

SUNDAY, JANUARY 29, 2017
Ajax v Den Haag
Feyenoord v NEC
Heerenveen v Groningen
PEC Zwolle v Twente

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2017
Den Haag v Vitesse

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2017
AZ v PSV
Groningen v Excelsior
NEC v GA Eagles
Willem II v Heracles

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2017
Roda JC v Ajax
Sparta v PEC Zwolle
Twente v Feyenoord
Utrecht v Heerenveen

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2017
PEC Zwolle v NEC

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2017
Feyenoord v Groningen
GA Eagles v Den Haag
Heracles v Roda JC
Vitesse v Willem II

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2017
Ajax v Sparta
Excelsior v Twente
Heerenveen v AZ
PSV v Utrecht

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2017
Roda JC v GA Eagles

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2017
PSV v NEC
Twente v Heerenveen
Utrecht v PEC Zwolle
Willem II v AZ

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017
Den Haag v Feyenoord
Heracles v Excelsior
Sparta v Groningen
Vitesse v Ajax

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2017
Den Haag v Twente

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2017
AZ v PEC Zwolle
Excelsior v Willem II
Groningen v Utrecht
Heerenveen v Roda JC

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2017
Ajax v Heracles
Feyenoord v PSV
GA Eagles v Vitesse
NEC v Sparta

FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 2017
AZ v Excelsior

SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 2017
Heerenveen v GA Eagles
PEC Zwolle v Vitesse
PSV v Roda JC
Twente v Willem II

SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 2017
Groningen v Ajax
NEC v Heracles
Sparta v Feyenoord
Utrecht v Den Haag

FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 2017
Vitesse v Sparta

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2017
Den Haag v NEC
Excelsior v Heerenveen
GA Eagles v PSV
Heracles v Utrecht

SUNDAY, MARCH 12, 2017
Feyenoord v AZ
Roda JC v Groningen
Ajax v Twente
Willem II v PEC Zwolle

FRIDAY, MARCH 17, 2017
Roda JC v Twente

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017
AZ v Den Haag
Groningen v Willem II
NEC v Utrecht
PSV v Vitesse

SUNDAY, MARCH 19, 2017
Excelsior v Ajax
GA Eagles v PEC Zwolle
Heerenveen v Feyenoord
Sparta v Heracles

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017
AZ v Groningen
Heracles v Heerenveen
PEC Zwolle v Excelsior
Sparta v PSV
Utrecht v Willem II

SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2017
Ajax v Feyenoord
Den Haag v Roda JC
Twente v GA Eagles
Vitesse v NEC

TUESDAY, APRIL 4, 2017
Excelsior v Utrecht
Heerenveen v Sparta

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2017
Ajax v AZ
Feyenoord v GA Eagles
Groningen v NEC
Heracles v Vitesse
Willem II v Den Haag

THURSDAY, APRIL 6, 2017
Roda JC v PEC Zwolle
Twente v PSV

FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 2017
Sparta v Excelsior

SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2017
Den Haag v Groningen
GA Eagles v Heracles
NEC v Ajax
Vitesse v Heerenveen

SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2017
AZ v Roda JC
PEC Zwolle v Feyenoord
PSV v Willem II
Utrecht v Twente

FRIDAY, APRIL 14, 2017
Heracles v AZ

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2017
Den Haag v PSV
Excelsior v Vitesse
Roda JC v Sparta
Twente v NEC

SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2017
Ajax v Heerenveen
Feyenoord v Utrecht
Groningen v PEC Zwolle
Willem II v GA Eagles

FRIDAY, APRIL 21, 2017
Heerenveen v Willem II

SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 2017
AZ v Twente
GA Eagles v Groningen
NEC v Excelsior
PEC Zwolle v Heracles

SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2017
PSV v Ajax
Sparta v Den Haag
Utrecht v Roda JC
Vitesse v Feyenoord

SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2017
Ajax v GA Eagles
Excelsior v Feyenoord
Groningen v PSV
Heracles v Den Haag
NEC v AZ
PEC Zwolle v Heerenveen
Roda JC v Willem II
Sparta v Twente
Utrecht v Vitesse

SUNDAY, MAY 14, 2017
AZ v Utrecht
Den Haag v Excelsior
Feyenoord v Heracles
GA Eagles v Sparta
Heerenveen v NEC
PSV v PEC Zwolle
Twente v Groningen
Vitesse v Roda JC
Willem II v Ajax

(All dates subject to change)

Juventus aim to dominate and snare the opposition's best

Not surprisingly, it has been Juventus who have dominated preparations for the new season. In late July, they sounded the largest blast on the transfer market when, after weeks of speculation, the club finally moved for Napoli's record-breaking goalscorer, Gonzalo Higuain, who ended last season with 36 Serie A goals to surpass the previous best of Milan's Swedish striker Gunner Nordhal.

However, it was a far from a happy parting of the ways for Higuain as Napoli refused to negotiate with Juve, who eventually had to accept the terms of the buy-out clause in the Argentinian's contract. Having offered the required €90million, the defending champions were then free to deal directly with the player. A four-year contract worth €7.5m per annum was agreed with the 28-year-old, who had a secret medical examination in Madrid just two days before he was due to rejoin Napoli for pre-season training.

> The transfer has not gone down well with Napoli supporters, who have come to idolise Higuain in a manner not seen since the days of his compatriot, Diego Maradona

Needless to say, the transfer has not gone down well with Napoli supporters, who have come to idolise Higuain in a manner not seen since the days of his compatriot, Diego Maradona.

It could be argued that, rather in the style of Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga, Juventus have taken to weakening their closest rivals – currently Napoli and Roma – by buying their best players. After all, ▸

New idol...Juventus fans greet Gonzalo Higuain

Strength in depth...Mehdi Benatia (left) joined Juve from Bayern

ITALIAN SERIE A 2016-17

1 Atalanta *(Bergamo)*
2 Bologna
3 Cagliari
4 Chievo *(Verona)*
5 Crotone
6 Empoli
7 Fiorentina
8 Genoa *(Genoa)*
Sampdoria
9 Inter *(Milan)*
Milan
10 Juventus *(Turin)*
Torino
11 Lazio *(Rome)*
Roma
12 Napoli *(Naples)*
13 Palermo
14 Pescara
15 Sassuolo
16 Udinese

NEW COACHES

GIAN PIERO GASPERINI *(Atalanta)*
Genoa coach for seven seasons but failed to win in his four months at Internazionale.

MASSIMO RASTELLI *(Cagliari)*
Former Napoli player who makes his Serie A coaching debut after promotion.

DAVIDE NICOLA *(Crotone)*
Has Serie A experience, having coached Livorno for five months in the 2012-2013 season.

GIOVANNI MARTUSCIELLO *(Empoli)*
A former Empoli player, who has been a number two for the past three years.

GIUSEPPE IACHINI *(Udinese)*
Won promotion to Serie A with Chievo, Brescia, Sampdoria and Palermo.

VINCENZO MONTELLA *(Milan)*
Was brilliant with Catania and Fiorentina, but less so with Sampdoria last season.

MASSIMO ODDO *(Pescara)*
Son of player and coach Francesco Oddo, he was a World Cup winner in 2006.

MARCO GIAMPAOLO *(Sampdoria)*
Replaced Vincenzo Montella after excellent season with Empoli who finished 10th.

SINISA MIHAJLOVIC *(Torino)*
The former Serbia coach was perhaps a disappointment with Milan last season.

SIMONE INZAGHI *(Lazio)*
Took charge after the farcical, three-day tenure of Marcelo Bielsa this July.

prior to the purchase of Higuain, they had already strengthened their dominant squad by acquiring Bosnian midfielder Miralem Pjanic from Roma for €32m. On top of that, they have also picked up Moroccan defender Mehdi Benatia from Bayern on loan, Brazilian full-back Dani Alves (on a free from Barcelona) and Croat winger Marko Pjaca for €22.5m from Dinamo Zagreb.

Traditionally, of course, Juventus' biggest rivals have been Milan and Internazionale, rather than Roma and Napoli, but neither of these fallen giants looks capable of mounting a title challenge any time.

Fourth last term, Inter are currently in limbo, stuck between one owner and another. In late June, the electronics giant Suning splashed out €270m for a 68.55 per cent share in the club to effectively take over ownership from Erick Thohir, the Indonesian who bought a majority shareholding from Massimo Moratti three years ago. However, the handover from the Thohir regime to Suning is inevitably taking time, and in slowing up the club's administration it has made mid-summer transfer dealings difficult.

Reports also suggest that Inter coach Roberto Mancini is uncertain about his place in the club's bright new future. Having started well last season, finishing the year top of the table, his side crumbled seriously in the springtime and the new owners may desire a fresh start.

On top of that, the agent of Inter's Argentinian striker Mauro Icardi – namely his wife, Wanda – has been troubling the transfer waters further by suggesting that Juventus and Napoli are interested in buying a player who has been seen as central to Inter's future plans.

What is clear, however, is that with Euro 2016 stars such as Eder and Ivan Perisic in their ranks, as well as new signing Ever Banega from Sevilla, not to mention Marcelo Brozovic, Geoffrey Kondogbia and Samir Handanovic on board, Inter do have one of the strongest squads in the land. When the uncertainty about their immediate future is finally dispelled, perhaps after an October AGM, there is no reason why Inter, with or without Mancini, should not realise its major seasonal objective: namely to qualify for next season's Champions League.

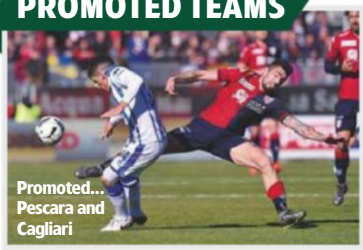
As for the other side of the city, Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi, who is now out of hospital after a heart scare, continues to appear on the point of selling the club – to different Chinese buyers – but never seems to quite land the fish. Solar energy giant GSR, headed by Sonny Wu, are the latest interested party, offering €500m for a 100 per cent holding. With Berlusconi under pressure from family members and business advisors to sell the club, it looks only a matter of time.

By the autumn, both Milan clubs could be in Chinese hands. That, too, could be another reason for looking forward to the new season.

Paddy Agnew

Happier times...Milan celebrate

PROMOTED TEAMS



Promoted... Pescara and Cagliari

CAGLIARI
After 11 successive seasons in Serie A, Cagliari were relegated a year ago, but the ease with which the Sardinian club immediately bounced back, winning the second tier, augurs well. Experienced players such as goalkeeper Marco Storari, utility man Simone Padoin (both ex-Juventus) and Euro 2016 winner Bruno Alves (from Fenerbahce) should make a telling contribution.

CROTONE
Having won promotion to the top flight for the first time, they become just the third Calabrian club – after Catanzaro and Reggina – to play in Serie A. So far, they seem determined to survive with the bones of last year's young team. The wisdom of that policy remains to be seen.

PESCARA
This is a second promotion to Serie A in the last 24 years, but with Gianluca Lapadula (Milan) and Rolando Mandragora (back to Juventus after loan) having moved on, all the signs suggest it could be a short-lived adventure.

TALKING POINTS

- Napoli spent €35m of the money they received from the sale of Higuain on Polish striker Arkadiusz Milik from Ajax. Can he continue where the Argentinian left off?
- Will Lazio regret their botched appointment of Marcelo Bielsa? The Rome club appeared to jump the gun by announcing the Argentinian's appointment before they had reached agreement on a number of players that Bielsa understood would be joining the club. When it became apparent that the player deals had not been secured, Bielsa backed out.
- How will new boss Vincenzo Montella fare

New...Arkadiusz Milik

Arrival...Inter's Geoffrey Kondogbia

at Milan? One of Serie A's most highly rated young coaches faces the biggest test of his fledgling career with the move to San Siro at what is an uncertain time for the former European champions.

● How long will Francesco Totti's farewell tour continue? The 39-year-old is preparing to play his 25th season with Roma after agreeing a new one-year deal.

● Can Parma claw their way back up the divisions? The former Serie A club went bankrupt in 2015 and re-formed in Serie D under the name of Parma Calcio 1913. They have already been promoted back to Lega Pro, the third tier of Italian football.

On the up...Parma

● Aside from Juventus, only three Serie A clubs had spent more than €10m on summer transfers by August 1: Roma, Napoli and Lazio.

● More stars from Euro 2016 made it to Serie A than other major leagues. Juventus signed Croatia winger Marko Pjaca and Belgium defender Jordan Lukaku joined Lazio. Bologna, meanwhile, went shopping in Eastern Europe, signing Hungary midfielder Adam Nagy from Ferencvaros for €1.5m and Czech Republic midfielder Ladislav Krejci from Sparta Prague for €4m.

ONES TO WATCH

EMANUELE GIACCHERINI *(Napoli)*
After a good season with Bologna, and a fine Euro 2016, it was no surprise Napoli spent €1.5m to sign him from Sunderland.

MIRALEM PJANIC *(Juventus)*
At €32m, the Bosnian was not cheap, but this was arguably the right moment in his career to join a side who are looking for a new Andrea Pirlo.

GONZALO HIGUAIN *(Juventus)*
The most expensive South American of all time will be expected to reproduce the goals of last season with Napoli.

FRANCESCO TOTTI *(Roma)*
At 39, this will (presumably) be the final season in a truly remarkable, one-club career. Likely to be used sparingly by Luciano Spalletti.

KEVIN STROOTMAN *(Roma)*
Knicknamed "The Washing Machine" because of his ability to clean up and recycle in Roma's midfield.

STEPHAN EL SHAARAWY *(Roma)*
Eight goals in half a season – after a January move from Monaco – suggest the best may yet be still to come.

ANTONIO CANDREVA *(Internazionale)*
The attacking midfielder is now at the top of his game, making this summer the perfect time to leave Lazio.

ELSEID HYSAJ *(Napoli)*
Still only 22, and a key player in Napoli's excellent season last year, the Albanian right-back can be expected to do even better this term.

ANDREA BELOTTI *(Torino)*
With 12 goals for Torino, nearly all in the second half of the season, he was one of the reasons why his battling club finished a comfortable 10th.

SADIQ UMAR *(Roma)*
Tall and mobile, the 19-year-old Nigerian scored against Chievo and Genoa last term and certainly looks like he could be one for the future.

Dec 4...Lazio v Roma

Jan 29...Napoli v Palermo

FIXTURES

SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 2016

Atalanta v Lazio
Bologna v Crotone
Chievo v Internazionale
Empoli v Sampdoria
Genoa v Cagliari
Juventus v Fiorentina
Milan v Torino
Palermo v Sassuolo
Pescara v Napoli
Roma v Udinese

SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2016

Cagliari v Roma
Crotone v Genoa
Fiorentina v Chievo
Internazionale v Palermo
Lazio v Juventus
Napoli v Milan
Sampdoria v Atalanta
Sassuolo v Pescara
Torino v Bologna
Udinese v Empoli

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2016

Atalanta v Torino
Bologna v Cagliari
Chievo v Lazio
Empoli v Crotone
Genoa v Fiorentina
Juventus v Sassuolo
Milan v Udinese
Palermo v Napoli
Pescara v Internazionale
Roma v Sampdoria

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2016

Cagliari v Atalanta
Crotone v Palermo
Fiorentina v Roma
Internazionale v Juventus
Lazio v Pescara
Napoli v Bologna
Sampdoria v Milan
Sassuolo v Genoa
Torino v Empoli
Udinese v Chievo

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2016

Atalanta v Palermo
Bologna v Sampdoria
Chievo v Sassuolo
Empoli v Internazionale
Genoa v Napoli
Juventus v Cagliari
Milan v Lazio
Pescara v Torino
Roma v Crotone
Udinese v Fiorentina

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2016

Cagliari v Sampdoria
Crotone v Atalanta
Fiorentina v Milan
Genoa v Pescara
Internazionale v Bologna
Lazio v Empoli
Napoli v Chievo
Palermo v Juventus
Sassuolo v Udinese
Torino v Roma

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2016

Atalanta v Napoli
Bologna v Genoa
Cagliari v Crotone
Empoli v Juventus
Milan v Sassuolo
Pescara v Chievo
Roma v Internazionale
Sampdoria v Palermo
Torino v Fiorentina
Udinese v Lazio

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2016

Chievo v Milan
Fiorentina v Atalanta
Genoa v Empoli
Internazionale v Cagliari
Juventus v Udinese
Lazio v Bologna
Napoli v Roma
Palermo v Torino
Pescara v Sampdoria
Sassuolo v Crotone

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2016

Atalanta v Internazionale
Bologna v Sassuolo
Cagliari v Fiorentina
Crotone v Napoli
Empoli v Chievo
Milan v Juventus
Roma v Palermo
Sampdoria v Genoa
Torino v Lazio
Udinese v Pescara

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2016

Chievo v Bologna
Fiorentina v Crotone
Genoa v Milan
Internazionale v Torino
Juventus v Sampdoria
Lazio v Cagliari
Napoli v Empoli
Palermo v Udinese
Pescara v Atalanta
Sassuolo v Roma

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2016

Atalanta v Genoa
Bologna v Fiorentina
Cagliari v Palermo
Crotone v Chievo
Empoli v Roma
Juventus v Napoli
Lazio v Sassuolo
Milan v Pescara
Sampdoria v Internazionale
Udinese v Torino

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2016

Chievo v Juventus
Fiorentina v Sampdoria
Genoa v Udinese
Internazionale v Crotone
Napoli v Lazio
Palermo v Milan
Pescara v Empoli
Roma v Bologna
Sassuolo v Atalanta
Torino v Cagliari

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2016

Atalanta v Roma
Bologna v Palermo
Chievo v Cagliari
Crotone v Torino
Empoli v Fiorentina
Juventus v Pescara
Lazio v Genoa
Milan v Internazionale
Sampdoria v Sassuolo
Udinese v Napoli

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2016

Bologna v Atalanta
Cagliari v Udinese
Crotone v Sampdoria
Empoli v Milan
Genoa v Juventus
Internazionale v Fiorentina
Napoli v Sassuolo
Palermo v Lazio
Roma v Pescara
Torino v Chievo

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016

Chievo v Genoa
Fiorentina v Palermo
Juventus v Atalanta
Lazio v Roma
Milan v Crotone
Napoli v Internazionale
Pescara v Cagliari
Sampdoria v Torino
Sassuolo v Empoli
Udinese v Bologna

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2016

Atalanta v Udinese
Bologna v Empoli
Cagliari v Napoli
Crotone v Pescara
Fiorentina v Sassuolo
Internazionale v Genoa
Palermo v Chievo
Roma v Milan
Sampdoria v Lazio
Torino v Juventus

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2016

Chievo v Sampdoria
Empoli v Cagliari
Genoa v Palermo
Juventus v Roma
Lazio v Fiorentina
Milan v Atalanta
Napoli v Torino
Pescara v Bologna
Sassuolo v Internazionale
Udinese v Crotone

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2016

Atalanta v Empoli
Bologna v Milan
Cagliari v Sassuolo
Crotone v Juventus
Fiorentina v Napoli
Internazionale v Lazio
Palermo v Pescara
Roma v Chievo
Sampdoria v Udinese
Torino v Genoa

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2017

Chievo v Atalanta
Empoli v Palermo
Genoa v Roma
Juventus v Bologna
Lazio v Crotone
Milan v Cagliari
Napoli v Sampdoria
Pescara v Fiorentina
Sassuolo v Torino
Udinese v Internazionale

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2017

Cagliari v Genoa
Crotone v Bologna
Fiorentina v Juventus
Internazionale v Chievo
Lazio v Atalanta
Napoli v Pescara
Sampdoria v Empoli
Sassuolo v Palermo
Torino v Milan
Udinese v Roma

Mar 12...Genoa v Sampdoria

Mar 12...Juventus v Milan

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2017

Atalanta v Sampdoria
Bologna v Torino
Chievo v Fiorentina
Empoli v Udinese
Genoa v Crotone
Juventus v Lazio
Milan v Napoli
Palermo v Internazionale
Pescara v Sassuolo
Roma v Cagliari

SUNDAY, JANUARY 29, 2017

Cagliari v Bologna
Crotone v Empoli
Fiorentina v Genoa
Internazionale v Pescara
Lazio v Chievo
Napoli v Palermo
Sampdoria v Roma
Sassuolo v Juventus
Torino v Atalanta
Udinese v Milan

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2017

Atalanta v Cagliari
Bologna v Napoli
Chievo v Udinese
Empoli v Torino
Genoa v Sassuolo
Juventus v Internazionale
Milan v Sampdoria
Palermo v Crotone
Pescara v Lazio
Roma v Fiorentina

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2017

Cagliari v Juventus
Crotone v Roma
Fiorentina v Udinese
Internazionale v Empoli
Lazio v Milan
Napoli v Genoa
Palermo v Atalanta
Sampdoria v Bologna
Sassuolo v Chievo
Torino v Pescara

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017

Atalanta v Crotone
Bologna v Internazionale
Chievo v Napoli
Empoli v Lazio
Juventus v Palermo
Milan v Fiorentina
Pescara v Genoa
Roma v Torino
Sampdoria v Cagliari
Udinese v Sassuolo

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2017

Chievo v Pescara
Crotone v Cagliari
Fiorentina v Torino
Genoa v Bologna
Internazionale v Roma
Juventus v Empoli
Lazio v Udinese
Napoli v Atalanta
Palermo v Sampdoria
Sassuolo v Milan

SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 2017

Atalanta v Fiorentina
Bologna v Lazio
Cagliari v Internazionale
Crotone v Sassuolo
Empoli v Genoa
Milan v Chievo
Roma v Napoli
Sampdoria v Pescara
Torino v Palermo
Udinese v Juventus

SUNDAY, MARCH 12, 2017

Chievo v Empoli
Fiorentina v Cagliari
Genoa v Sampdoria
Internazionale v Atalanta
Juventus v Milan
Lazio v Torino
Napoli v Crotone
Palermo v Roma
Pescara v Udinese
Sassuolo v Bologna

SUNDAY, MARCH 19, 2017

Atalanta v Pescara
Bologna v Chievo
Cagliari v Lazio
Crotone v Fiorentina
Empoli v Napoli
Milan v Genoa
Roma v Sassuolo
Sampdoria v Juventus
Torino v Internazionale
Udinese v Palermo

SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2017

Chievo v Crotone
Fiorentina v Bologna
Genoa v Atalanta
Internazionale v Sampdoria
Napoli v Juventus
Palermo v Cagliari
Pescara v Milan
Roma v Empoli
Sassuolo v Lazio
Torino v Udinese

SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2017

Atalanta v Sassuolo
Bologna v Roma
Cagliari v Torino
Crotone v Internazionale
Empoli v Pescara
Juventus v Chievo
Lazio v Napoli
Milan v Palermo
Sampdoria v Fiorentina
Udinese v Genoa

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2017

Cagliari v Chievo
Fiorentina v Empoli
Genoa v Lazio
Internazionale v Milan
Napoli v Udinese
Palermo v Bologna
Pescara v Juventus
Roma v Atalanta
Sassuolo v Sampdoria
Torino v Crotone

SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2017

Atalanta v Bologna
Chievo v Torino
Fiorentina v Internazionale
Juventus v Genoa
Lazio v Palermo
Milan v Empoli
Pescara v Roma
Sampdoria v Crotone
Sassuolo v Napoli
Udinese v Cagliari

SUNDAY, APRIL 30, 2017

Atalanta v Juventus
Bologna v Udinese
Cagliari v Pescara
Crotone v Milan
Empoli v Sassuolo
Genoa v Chievo
Internazionale v Napoli
Palermo v Fiorentina
Roma v Lazio
Torino v Sampdoria

SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2017

Chievo v Palermo
Empoli v Bologna
Genoa v Internazionale
Juventus v Torino
Lazio v Sampdoria
Milan v Roma
Napoli v Cagliari
Pescara v Crotone
Sassuolo v Fiorentina
Udinese v Atalanta

SUNDAY, MAY 14, 2017

Atalanta v Milan
Bologna v Pescara
Cagliari v Empoli
Crotone v Udinese
Fiorentina v Lazio
Internazionale v Sassuolo
Palermo v Genoa
Roma v Juventus
Sampdoria v Chievo
Torino v Napoli

SUNDAY, MAY 21, 2017

Chievo v Roma
Empoli v Atalanta
Genoa v Torino
Juventus v Crotone
Lazio v Internazionale
Milan v Bologna
Napoli v Fiorentina
Pescara v Palermo
Sassuolo v Cagliari
Udinese v Sampdoria

SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2017

Atalanta v Chievo
Bologna v Juventus
Cagliari v Milan
Crotone v Lazio
Fiorentina v Pescara
Internazionale v Udinese
Palermo v Empoli
Roma v Genoa
Sampdoria v Napoli
Torino v Sassuolo

(All dates subject to change)

Porto can't afford fourth blank

Last season was a chastening experience for both Porto and Nuno Espirito Santo. Having bombed badly in Europe, FCP finished way behind Benfica (15 points) and Sporting (13 points) in the league, and then missed out on the consolation prize of the Portuguese Cup when they were beaten in the Final by Braga.

It was not a whole lot better for Nuno. The former Porto goalkeeper had impressed in each of his first three seasons as a head coach, leading modest Rio Ave to two cup Finals before moving to Spain and steering Valencia into the Champions League in his first season.

He was, however, unable to replicate that success last term, and a poor start – which included a group-stage exit from the Champions League – triggered widespread animosity towards him from fans at the Mestalla and resulted in his resignation in November.

But the experience has not shaken Nuno's confidence in his abilities to succeed as a coach. "This isn't the moment to make promises, but rather to give guarantees. I follow my convictions and I have an absurd conviction that we will be winners," was Nuno's curious turn of phrase upon being unveiled at the Estadio do Dragao alongside club president Pinto Da Costa and vice-president Antero Henrique as Porto's new boss this summer.

It is no coincidence that Costa and Henrique appeared side by side in a show of unity amid rumours of a rift between the two major figures on the club's board. This appointment is as important for the historical Porto leader and his directors as it is to the 42-year-old coach.

If Porto fail to win the championship, it will be the first time in Da Costa's 34-year reign that the northerners have gone four seasons without a title, and that will lend ▸

Chase...Sporting's Ezequiel Schelotto (left) and Alan Ruiz will hope to close the gap on Benfica

Arrival...Oscar Benitez (in red) joined Benfica from Lanus of Argentina

PORTUGUESE PRIMEIRA LIGA 2016-17

1 Arouca
2 Belenenses *(Lisbon)*
Benfica
Sporting
3 Boavista *(Porto)*
Porto
4 Braga
5 Chaves
6 Estoril
7 Feirense *(Santa Maria da Feira)*
8 Maritimo *(Funchal, Madeira)*
Nacional
9 Moreirense *(Moreira de Conegos)*
10 Pacos Ferreira
11 Rio Ave *(Vila do Conde)*
12 Tondela
13 Vitoria Guimaraes
14 Vitoria Setubal

New boss...Nuno (below right) with Porto president Pinto Da Costa

ONES TO WATCH

▲ ANDRE SILVA
(Porto)
Widely touted as the biggest Portuguese striking talent in the domestic league, he will be aiming to become a regular fixture for Porto.

▲ IURI MEDEIROS
(Sporting)
Much is expected of the winger, who many believe has a shot at becoming the most well-known Azorean footballer since Pedro Pauleta.

▲ JUAN QUINTERO
(Porto)
The talented Colombian, still only 23, may be given another chance to show what he can do by new Porto coach Nuno.

▲ RAUL JIMENEZ
(Benfica)
The Mexican striker scored some crucial goals for Benfica last season and will be looking to make the number nine spot his own this term.

▲ ANDRE CARRILLO
(Benfica)
The extravagantly talented Peruvian winger spent a year out in the cold at Sporting before signing for rivals Benfica – for free.

▲ RICARDO HORTA
(Braga)
Snapped up on loan from Malaga, Braga expect big things from the 21-year-old forward. Won his only senior international cap in 2014.

▲ FRANCISCO SOARES
(Vitoria Guimaraes)
After an impressive season at Nacional, will the 25-year-old be able to make further progress at Guimaraes?

Despair...Porto are beaten by Braga in the Cup Final

credence to the increasingly prevalent belief that the club's domination of Portuguese football is well and truly over.

With Benfica and Sporting in rude health, the stakes could not be higher for Porto, but a confident Nuno appears anything but overawed, stating: "Pressure is always present when you're a coach, but being Porto coach is a tremendous motivation for me and those working with me. We'll be working 24 hours a day to make sure we are a winning team."

Da Costa has masterminded an astoundingly successful era at the club, during which time Porto have won 20 championship titles and twice been crowned champions of Europe. But three trophy-less seasons and a succession of failed coaching appointments in Paulo Fonseca, Julen Lopetegui and Jose Peseiro have eroded confidence in the 78-year-old's ability to keep making the right decisions.

Few thought they would ever see the day when his position was brought into question, but another season without the top prize is likely to see the sporadic calls for the club to renew its hierarchy turn into a clamour.

Tom Kundert

Solid...Pedro Martins

NEW COACHES

JOSE PESEIRO *(Braga)*
Led Braga to Portuguese League Cup success in a previous stint.

JOSE COUCEIRO *(Vitoria Setubal)*
Experienced, he returns for a third spell at the helm of Vitoria.

JOSE MOTA *(Feirense)*
Will need all of his experience to keep the team among the big boys.

PAULO CESAR GUSMAO *(Maritimo)*
Brazilian who has coached several big clubs in his homeland.

PEPA *(Moreirense)*
The youngest coach in the top flight, at 35, he has impressed so far in the lower leagues.

CARLOS PINTO *(Pacos Ferreira)*
Arrives at his home-town club after five years in the lower leagues and replaced Jorge Simao in May.

NUNO ESPIRITO SANTO *(Porto)*
Former boss of Valencia, he is out to redeem his reputation and rejuvenate Porto's fortunes.

JORGE SIMAO *(Chaves)*
Did an excellent job at Pacos Ferreira last season before joing the newly promoted outfit.

PEDRO MARTINS *(Vitoria Guimaraes)*
Will be looking to enhance his solid reputation.

NUNO CAPUCHO *(Rio Ave)*
Former Porto youth coach with a single season at Varzim.

TALKING POINTS

- Can Jonas keep up his phenomenal scoring rate? The Brazilian has managed a remarkable 67 goals in 83 matches since joining Benfica on a free transfer in October 2014. Another prolific season would further embellish his status as a club icon.
- Can Iker Casillas restore his reputation? The Porto goalkeeper was bought a year ago amid much fanfare, but made more headlines for his mistakes than his saves. Blunders at Vitoria Guimaraes and Braga stick in the mind, but it was the errors home and away against Dynamo Kiev that ruined Porto's Champions League ambitions and were the most costly.
- Will Jorge Jesus take Europe seriously? The Sporting coach put all the emphasis on winning the league last season, and came desperately close to ending the club's 15-year wait for a national title, finishing just two points behind Benfica. It came at a cost though, with a half-hearted European campaign that included an embarrassing 3-0 defeat to Albania's Skenderbeu.
- Can Pedro Martins continue his upward trajectory? Having done a consistently excellent job at Maritimo and Rio Ave, he has been given the chance at Vitoria Guimaraes, Portugal's best-supported club outside the big three. Should he thrive at the Dom Afonso Henriques, he will be well positioned for his next move.
- Will Portugal's Euro 2016 success have a positive knock-on effect on crowds? Attendance figures have risen steadily over recent years and the hope is Portugal's European Championship triumph will further boost numbers.
- Who will be this season's emerging star? He only made his debut in October 2015 but by the end of the season Benfica sensation Renato Sanches had won the league, secured a huge-money transfer to Bayern Munich and picked up a Euro 2016 winner's medal. Who will be this season's new star? Porto's Andre Silva, Sporting's Matheus Pereira and Benfica's Andre Horta are all in the running.
- Will Benfica survive without Nicolas Gaitan? The Argentinian gave magnificent service to Benfica over six seasons, winning 10 trophies. Can the Portuguese champions adequately replace his uncanny ability to open up the tightest of defences?

Priorities...Jorge Jesus

PROMOTED TEAMS

FEIRENSE
One of Portugal's better-supported clubs, they make a welcome return to the top division after four years away.

CHAVES
Back after 17 years, it will be a fine effort if the club from the northern border town with Spain manage to stay up.

Dec 4...Porto v Braga

Mar 19...Pacos Ferreira v Benfica

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 2016
Boavista v Arouca
Estoril v Feirense
Moreirense v Pacos Ferreira
Nacional v Chaves
Rio Ave v Porto
Sporting v Maritimo
Tondela v Benfica
V Guimaraes v Braga
Vitoria Setubal v Belenenses

SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 2016
Arouca v Nacional
Belenenses v Boavista
Benfica v Vitoria Setubal
Braga v Rio Ave
Chaves v Tondela
Feirense v Moreirense
Maritimo v V Guimaraes
Pacos Ferreira v Sporting
Porto v Estoril

SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2016
Boavista v Chaves
Estoril v Braga
Moreirense v Maritimo
Nacional v Benfica
Rio Ave v Feirense
Sporting v Porto
Tondela v Belenenses
V Guimaraes v Pacos Ferreira
Vitoria Setubal v Arouca

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2016
Arouca v Benfica
Belenenses v Nacional
Braga v Boavista
Chaves v Vitoria Setubal
Feirense v Tondela
Maritimo v Rio Ave
Pacos Ferreira v Estoril
Porto v V Guimaraes
Sporting v Moreirense

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2016
Arouca v Chaves
Benfica v Braga
Boavista v Feirense
Estoril v Moreirense
Nacional v Maritimo
Rio Ave v Sporting
Tondela v Porto
V Guimaraes v Belenenses
Vitoria Setubal v Pacos Ferreira

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2016
Belenenses v Arouca
Braga v Vitoria Setubal
Chaves v Benfica
Feirense v Nacional
Maritimo v Tondela
Moreirense v V Guimaraes
Pacos Ferreira v Rio Ave
Porto v Boavista
Sporting v Estoril

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2016
Arouca v Braga
Benfica v Feirense
Boavista v Moreirense
Chaves v Belenenses
Nacional v Porto
Rio Ave v Estoril
Tondela v Pacos Ferreira
V Guimaraes v Sporting
Vitoria Setubal v Maritimo

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2016
Belenenses v Benfica
Braga v Chaves
Estoril v V Guimaraes
Feirense v Vitoria Setubal
Maritimo v Boavista
Moreirense v Rio Ave
Pacos Ferreira v Nacional
Porto v Arouca
Sporting v Tondela

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2016
Arouca v Maritimo
Benfica v Pacos Ferreira
Boavista v Estoril
Braga v Belenenses
Chaves v Feirense
Nacional v Sporting
Rio Ave v V Guimaraes
Tondela v Moreirense
Vitoria Setubal v Porto

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2016
Estoril v Tondela
Feirense v Belenenses
Maritimo v Braga
Moreirense v Vitoria Setubal
Pacos Ferreira v Chaves
Porto v Benfica
Rio Ave v Boavista
Sporting v Arouca
V Guimaraes v Nacional

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2016
Arouca v Pacos Ferreira
Belenenses v Porto
Benfica v Moreirense
Boavista v Sporting
Braga v Feirense
Chaves v Maritimo
Nacional v Estoril
Tondela v V Guimaraes
Vitoria Setubal v Rio Ave

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016
Estoril v Belenenses
Feirense v Arouca
Maritimo v Benfica
Moreirense v Nacional
Pacos Ferreira v Boavista
Porto v Braga
Rio Ave v Tondela
Sporting v Vitoria Setubal
V Guimaraes v Chaves

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2016
Arouca v Rio Ave
Belenenses v Maritimo
Benfica v Sporting
Boavista v V Guimaraes
Braga v Pacos Ferreira
Chaves v Moreirense
Feirense v Porto
Nacional v Tondela
Vitoria Setubal v Estoril

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2016
Estoril v Benfica
Maritimo v Feirense
Moreirense v Arouca
Pacos Ferreira v Belenenses
Porto v Chaves
Rio Ave v Nacional
Sporting v Braga
Tondela v Boavista
V Guimaraes v Vitoria Setubal

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2016
Arouca v V Guimaraes
Belenenses v Sporting
Benfica v Rio Ave
Braga v Moreirense
Chaves v Estoril
Feirense v Pacos Ferreira
Nacional v Boavista
Porto v Maritimo
Vitoria Setubal v Tondela

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2017
Boavista v Vitoria Setubal
Estoril v Maritimo
Moreirense v Belenenses
Nacional v Braga
Pacos Ferreira v Porto
Rio Ave v Chaves
Sporting v Feirense
Tondela v Arouca
V Guimaraes v Benfica

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2017
Arouca v Estoril
Belenenses v Rio Ave
Benfica v Boavista
Braga v Tondela
Chaves v Sporting
Feirense v V Guimaraes
Maritimo v Pacos Ferreira
Porto v Moreirense
Vitoria Setubal v Nacional

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2017
Arouca v Boavista
Belenenses v Vitoria Setubal
Benfica v Tondela
Braga v V Guimaraes
Chaves v Nacional
Feirense v Estoril
Maritimo v Sporting
Pacos Ferreira v Moreirense
Porto v Rio Ave

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2017
Boavista v Belenenses
Estoril v Porto
Moreirense v Feirense
Nacional v Arouca
Rio Ave v Braga
Sporting v Pacos Ferreira
Tondela v Chaves
V Guimaraes v Maritimo
Vitoria Setubal v Benfica

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2017
Arouca v Vitoria Setubal
Belenenses v Tondela
Benfica v Nacional
Braga v Estoril
Chaves v Boavista
Feirense v Rio Ave
Maritimo v Moreirense
Pacos Ferreira v V Guimaraes
Porto v Sporting

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2017
Benfica v Arouca
Boavista v Braga
Estoril v Pacos Ferreira
Moreirense v Sporting
Nacional v Belenenses
Rio Ave v Maritimo
Tondela v Feirense
V Guimaraes v Porto
Vitoria Setubal v Chaves

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017
Belenenses v V Guimaraes
Braga v Benfica
Chaves v Arouca
Feirense v Boavista
Maritimo v Nacional
Moreirense v Estoril
Pacos Ferreira v Vitoria Setubal
Porto v Tondela
Sporting v Rio Ave

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2017
Arouca v Belenenses
Benfica v Chaves
Boavista v Porto
Estoril v Sporting
Nacional v Feirense
Rio Ave v Pacos Ferreira
Tondela v Maritimo
V Guimaraes v Moreirense
Vitoria Setubal v Braga

SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 2017
Belenenses v Chaves
Braga v Arouca
Estoril v Rio Ave
Feirense v Benfica
Maritimo v Vitoria Setubal
Moreirense v Boavista
Pacos Ferreira v Tondela
Porto v Nacional
Sporting v V Guimaraes

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2017
Arouca v Porto
Benfica v Belenenses
Boavista v Maritimo
Chaves v Braga
Nacional v Pacos Ferreira
Rio Ave v Moreirense
Tondela v Sporting
V Guimaraes v Estoril
Vitoria Setubal v Feirense

SUNDAY, MARCH 19, 2017
Belenenses v Braga
Estoril v Boavista
Feirense v Chaves
Maritimo v Arouca
Moreirense v Tondela
Pacos Ferreira v Benfica
Porto v Vitoria Setubal
Sporting v Nacional
V Guimaraes v Rio Ave

SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2017
Arouca v Sporting
Belenenses v Feirense
Benfica v Porto
Boavista v Rio Ave
Braga v Maritimo
Chaves v Pacos Ferreira
Nacional v V Guimaraes
Tondela v Estoril
Vitoria Setubal v Moreirense

SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2017
Estoril v Nacional
Feirense v Braga
Maritimo v Chaves
Moreirense v Benfica
Pacos Ferreira v Arouca
Porto v Belenenses
Rio Ave v Vitoria Setubal
Sporting v Boavista
V Guimaraes v Tondela

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2017
Arouca v Feirense
Belenenses v Estoril
Benfica v Maritimo
Boavista v Pacos Ferreira
Braga v Porto
Chaves v V Guimaraes
Nacional v Moreirense
Tondela v Rio Ave
Vitoria Setubal v Sporting

SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2017
Estoril v Vitoria Setubal
Maritimo v Belenenses
Moreirense v Chaves
Pacos Ferreira v Braga
Porto v Feirense
Rio Ave v Arouca
Sporting v Benfica
Tondela v Nacional
V Guimaraes v Boavista

SUNDAY, APRIL 30, 2017
Arouca v Moreirense
Belenenses v Pacos Ferreira
Benfica v Estoril
Boavista v Tondela
Braga v Sporting
Chaves v Porto
Feirense v Maritimo
Nacional v Rio Ave
Vitoria Setubal v V Guimaraes

SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2017
Boavista v Nacional
Estoril v Chaves
Maritimo v Porto
Moreirense v Braga
Pacos Ferreira v Feirense
Rio Ave v Benfica
Sporting v Belenenses
Tondela v Vitoria Setubal
V Guimaraes v Arouca

SUNDAY, MAY 14 2017
Arouca v Tondela
Belenenses v Moreirense
Benfica v V Guimaraes
Braga v Nacional
Chaves v Rio Ave
Feirense v Sporting
Maritimo v Estoril
Porto v Pacos Ferreira
Vitoria Setubal v Boavista

SUNDAY, MAY 21, 2017
Boavista v Benfica
Estoril v Arouca
Moreirense v Porto
Nacional v Vitoria Setubal
Pacos Ferreira v Maritimo
Rio Ave v Belenenses
Sporting v Chaves
Tondela v Braga
V Guimaraes v Feirense

(All dates subject to change)

Post-Euro boost required

Citizenship... Mario Fernandes (left)

Following Russia's miserable performance at Euro 2016, the domestic Premier League is faced with the tough task of restoring the confidence of fans and bringing them back to the stands.

The two main title contenders, last season's champions CSKA and Russian Cup-winners Zenit, met in the Super Cup game at Moscow's Lokomotiv stadium in July, after its intended role as the inaugural match at the long-awaited CSKA arena had to be cancelled as construction work was not completed in time.

Zenit ran out 1-0 winners, thanks to a first-half goal from their Brazilian midfielder Mauricio.

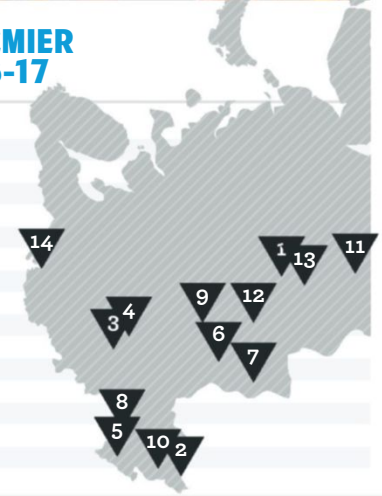
CSKA boss Leonid Slutsky, who had combined his role with that of national coach, resigned from his second job after France and will now be fully engaged with the club. According to many experts, his dual responsibilities almost cost CSKA last season's title, which they managed to snatch in their final game of the campaign, against Rubin, only thanks to brilliant performances from keeper Igor Akinfeev and playmaker Alan Dzagoev. Akinfeev will once again captain the side while Dzagoev, who scored the winning goal but then got injured, is almost back to full fitness and will be keen to make up for having missed the Euros.

Having sold their leading striker Ahmed Musa to Leicester City for £16.6million, CSKA have had to look elsewhere for a centre-forward and eventually replaced the Nigerian with Ivorian striker Lacina Traore. The club's other noteworthy move was giving Russian citizenship to Mario Fernandes. The Brazilian right-back will no longer be rated as a "legionnaire", which is important in the league which still limits the number of foreign players. Fernandes, who was capped by Brazil in a friendly against Japan in 2014, will now also be

Trophy...Zenit beat CSKA in this season's Super Cup

RUSSIAN PREMIER LEAGUE 2016-17

1 Amkar *(Perm)*
2 Anzhi *(Makhachkala)*
3 Arsenal *(Tula)*
4 CSKA *(Moscow)*
Lokomotiv Moscow
Spartak
5 Krasnodar
6 Krylia Sovetov *(Samara)*
7 Orenburg
8 Rostov
9 Rubin *(Kazan)*
10 Terek *(Grozny)*
11 Tom *(Tomsk)*
12 Ufa
13 Ural *(Yekaterinburg)*
14 Zenit *(St Petersburg)*



PROMOTED TEAMS

Up...Arsenal (in white) take on Spartak

ARSENAL
Finished second and clinched promotion with an impressive spring finish under coach Sergei Pavlov.

ORENBURG
Won the second division but had to change their name from Gazovik to that of the city where they are based. They also lost their powerful patron Gazprom as the league does not allow double-ownership and the company owns Zenit.

TOM TOMSK
Made a comeback by winning the play-off series against top-division Kuban Krasnodar, whose demotion left FC Krasnodar as the city's only Premier League representatives.

NEW COACHES

PAVEL VRBA *(Anzhi)*
Joined Anzhi after Czech Republic's failure to reach the knockout stage of Euro 2016. Has won a number of national titles.

JAVIER GRACIA *(Rubin Kazan)*
Former midfielder who had done most of his coaching in Spain before joining Rubin on a four-year contract.

VICTOR GONCHARENKO *(Ufa)*
The Belarusian left his post as CSKA assistant in favour of Ufa. Had a good record in Europa with BATE.

MIRCEA LUCESCU *(Zenit)*
Romanian who took Shakhtar Donetsk to victory in the 2009 UEFA Cup, as well as eight league titles.

Lost time...Alan Dzagoev will want to make up for missing out on France

eligible to play for Russia.

While last season's surprise runners-up Rostov prolonged the contract with one the country's top coaches in Kurban Berdyev, Zenit found a replacement for Portuguese boss Andre Villas-Boas in 71-year-old Romanian Mircea Lucecsu, who signed a two-year deal after a 12-year spell with Shakhtar Donetsk.

One of the Russian league's top players of the last decade, Hulk left Zenit for China, with the 29-year-old Brazilian international striker joining Shanghai SIPG for almost €56m plus bonuses, which was a record for Russian football.

Zenit recalled the country's all-time leading international goalscorer Alexander Kerzhakov from his loan spell in Switzerland with Zurich, but unless he is paired with Artem Dzyuba he will be in direct competition for a starting place with the current Russian first choice.

Fifth-placed Spartak Moscow retained Dmitri Alenichev as coach and signed Brazilian midfielder Fernando from Sampdoria for €12m, making him the league's most expensive purchase so far.

Victor Gusev

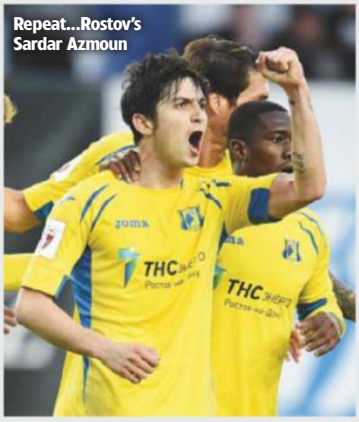
Retained...Spartak's Dmitri Alenichev

TALKING POINTS

- Will the Premier League eventually lift the foreign-player restriction which limits the number of "legionnaires" to six on the pitch at one time per team? The league is planning to discuss the issue in September. Proposed options are: increasing the number to seven, or limiting the number of foreigners to 10, but in the squad rather than on the pitch at any one time.

Concerns... fan behaviour

- Dynamo Moscow will be determined to gain promotion back to the top flight before their new Lev Yashin Arena is opened next year.
- Zenit have a new coach and money to spend after they sold several big names.
- The Premier League championship, like everything in Russian football these days, will be put under the microscope ahead of the 2018 World Cup by an international community concerned with fan violence and racial intolerance.
- Last year's surprise package Rostov will almost certainly struggle to repeat last season's second place and their future could be marred by financial problems.


Repeat...Rostov's Sardar Azmoun

ONES TO WATCH

ALEXANDER KERZHAKOV *(Zenit)*
First joined the club in 2001 and, after spells with Sevilla and Dynamo Moscow, now back at Zenit.

FEDOR SMOLOV *(Krasnodar)*
The league's top scorer did not live up to the expectations in France but was on target for his club again in pre-season.

STANISLAV KRITSYUK *(Krasnodar)*
On loan from Braga last season, the keeper has now signed a permanent contract until 2020.

ALEKSANDR GOLOVIN *(CSKA)*
Failed to impress in France but, at 20, is regarded the most talented player of his generation in Russia.

ROBERT MAK *(Zenit)*
Slovakia international midfielder who joined Zenit from PAOK for €3.5m after impressing against Russia at Euro 2016.

FERNANDO *(Spartak)*
Spartak's record signing, the Brazilian defensive midfielder joined the Moscow club from Sampdoria for €13m.

LACINA TRAORE *(CSKA)*
The Ivorian striker is on loan from Monaco and replaces Ahmed Musa as the spearhead of the CSKA attack.

July 30...Zenit v Lokomotiv Moscow

May 20... Arsenal v Spartak

SATURDAY, JULY 30, 2016
Anzhi v CSKA
Orenburg v Rostov
Zenit v Loko Moscow

SUNDAY, JULY 31, 2016
Spartak v Arsenal
Terek v Krylia Sovetov
Ural v Ufa

MONDAY, AUGUST 1, 2016
Krasnodar v Tom Tomsk
Rubin Kazan v Amkar Perm

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6, 2016
Arsenal v Rubin Kazan
Ufa v Zenit

SUNDAY, AUGUST 7, 2016
Amkar Perm v Anzhi
CSKA v Orenburg
Loko Moscow v Tom Tomsk
Rostov v Ural

MONDAY, AUGUST 8. 2016
Krasnodar v Terek
Spartak v Krylia Sovetov

FRIDAY, AUGUST 12, 2016
Zenit v Rostov

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13, 2016
Krylia Sovetov v Krasnodar
Rubin Kazan v Spartak
Ural v CSKA

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 2016
Anzhi v Arsenal
Terek v Loko Moscow
Tom Tomsk v Ufa

MONDAY, AUGUST 15, 2016
Orenburg v Amkar Perm

FRIDAY, AUGUST 19, 2016
Rubin Kazan v Anzhi

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 2016
Rostov v Tom Tomsk
Ufa v Terek
Zenit v CSKA

SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 2016
Amkar Perm v Ural
Loko Moscow v Krylia Sovetov
Spartak v Krasnodar

MONDAY, AUGUST 22, 2016
Arsenal v Orenburg

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26, 2016
Krylia Sovetov v Ufa

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27, 2016
Orenburg v Rubin Kazan
Tom Tomsk v CSKA
Zenit v Amkar Perm

SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2016
Anzhi v Spartak
Krasnodar v Loko Moscow
Terek v Rostov
Ural v Arsenal

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER10, 2016
Amkar Perm v Tom Tomsk
Anzhi v Orenburg
Arsenal v Ural
CSKA v Terek
Rostov v Krylia Sovetov
Rubin Kazan v Zenit
Spartak v Loko Moscow
Ufa v Krasnodar

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER17, 2016
Krasnodar v Rostov
Krylia Sovetov v CSKA
Loko Moscow v Ufa
Orenburg v Spartak
Terek v Amkar Perm
Tom Tomsk v Arsenal
Ural v Rubin Kazan
Zenit v Anzhi

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER25, 2016
Amkar Perm v Krylia Sovetov
Anzhi v Ural
Arsenal v Terek
CSKA v Krasnodar
Orenburg v Zenit
Rostov v Loko Moscow
Rubin Kazan v Tom Tomsk
Spartak v Ufa

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2016
Krasnodar v Amkar Perm
Krylia Sovetov v Arsenal
Loko Moscow v CSKA
Terek v Rubin Kazan
Tom Tomsk v Anzhi
Ufa v Rostov
Ural v Orenburg
Zenit v Spartak

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2016
Amkar Perm v Loko Moscow
Anzhi v Terek
Arsenal v Krasnodar
CSKA v Ufa
Orenburg v Tom Tomsk
Rubin Kazan v Krylia Sovetov
Spartak v Rostov
Zenit v Ural

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2016
Krasnodar v Rubin Kazan
Krylia Sovetov v Anzhi
Loko Moscow v Arsenal
Rostov v CSKA
Terek v Orenburg
Tom Tomsk v Zenit
Ufa v Amkar Perm
Ural v Spartak

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2016
Amkar Perm v Rostov
Anzhi v Krasnodar
Arsenal v Ufa
Orenburg v Krylia Sovetov
Rubin Kazan v Loko Moscow
Spartak v CSKA
Ural v Tom Tomsk
Zenit v Terek

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2016
CSKA v Amkar Perm
Krasnodar v Orenburg
Krylia Sovetov v Zenit
Loko Moscow v Anzhi
Rostov v Arsenal
Terek v Ural
Tom Tomsk v Spartak
Ufa v Rubin Kazan

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2016
Anzhi v Ufa
Arsenal v CSKA
Orenburg v Loko Moscow
Rubin Kazan v Rostov
Spartak v Amkar Perm
Tom Tomsk v Terek
Ural v Krylia Sovetov
Zenit v Krasnodar

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2016
Amkar Perm v Arsenal
CSKA v Rubin Kazan
Krasnodar v Ural
Krylia Sovetov v Tom Tomsk
Loko Moscow v Zenit
Rostov v Anzhi
Terek v Spartak
Ufa v Orenburg

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016
Anzhi v Amkar Perm
Krylia Sovetov v Spartak
Orenburg v CSKA
Rubin Kazan v Arsenal
Terek v Krasnodar
Tom Tomsk v Loko Moscow
Ural v Ufa
Zenit v Rostov

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2016
Amkar Perm v Orenburg
Arsenal v Anzhi
CSKA v Zenit
Krasnodar v Krylia Sovetov
Loko Moscow v Terek
Rostov v Ural
Spartak v Rubin Kazan
Ufa v Tom Tomsk

SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 2017
Anzhi v Rubin Kazan
Krasnodar v Spartak
Krylia Sovetov v Loko Moscow
Orenburg v Arsenal
Terek v Ufa
Tom Tomsk v Rostov
Ural v CSKA
Zenit v Amkar Perm

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2017
Amkar Perm v Ural
Arsenal v Zenit
CSKA v Tom Tomsk
Loko Moscow v Krasnodar
Rostov v Terek
Rubin Kazan v Orenburg
Spartak v Anzhi
Ufa v Krylia Sovetov

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017
Krasnodar v Ufa
Krylia Sovetov v Rostov
Loko Moscow v Spartak
Orenburg v Anzhi
Terek v CSKA
Tom Tomsk v Amkar Perm
Ural v Arsenal
Zenit v Rubin Kazan

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017
Amkar Perm v Terek
Anzhi v Zenit
Arsenal v Tom Tomsk
CSKA v Krylia Sovetov
Rostov v Krasnodar
Rubin Kazan v Ural
Spartak v Orenburg
Ufa v Loko Moscow

SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2017
Krasnodar v CSKA
Krylia Sovetov v Amkar Perm
Loko Moscow v Rostov
Terek v Arsenal
Tom Tomsk v Rubin Kazan
Ufa v Spartak
Ural v Anzhi
Zenit v Orenburg

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2017
Amkar Perm v Krasnodar
Anzhi v Tom Tomsk
Arsenal v Krylia Sovetov
CSKA v Loko Moscow
Orenburg v Ural
Rostov v Ufa
Rubin Kazan v Terek
Spartak v Zenit

SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 2017
Krasnodar v Arsenal
Krylia Sovetov v Rubin Kazan
Loko Moscow v Amkar Perm
Rostov v Spartak
Terek v Anzhi
Tom Tomsk v Orenburg
Ufa v CSKA
Ural v Zenit

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 2017
Amkar Perm v Ufa
Anzhi v Krylia Sovetov
Arsenal v Loko Moscow
CSKA v Rostov
Orenburg v Terek
Rubin Kazan v Krasnodar
Spartak v Ural
Zenit v Tom Tomsk

SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 2017
CSKA v Spartak
Krasnodar v Anzhi
Krylia Sovetov v Orenburg
Loko Moscow v Rubin Kazan
Rostov v Amkar Perm
Terek v Zenit
Tom Tomsk v Ural
Ufa v Arsenal

SATURDAY, MAY 6, 2017
Amkar Perm v CSKA
Anzhi v Loko Moscow
Arsenal v Rostov
Orenburg v Krasnodar
Rubin Kazan v Ufa
Spartak v Tom Tomsk
Ural v Terek
Zenit v Krylia Sovetov

SATURDAY, MAY 13, 2017
Amkar Perm v Spartak
CSKA v Arsenal
Krasnodar v Zenit
Krylia Sovetov v Ural
Loko Moscow v Orenburg
Rostov v Rubin Kazan
Terek v Tom Tomsk
Ufa v Anzhi

WEDNESDAY, MAY 17, 2017
Anzhi v Rostov
Arsenal v Amkar Perm
Orenburg v Ufa
Rubin Kazan v CSKA
Spartak v Terek
Tom Tomsk v Krylia Sovetov
Ural v Krasnodar
Zenit v Loko Moscow

SATURDAY, MAY 20, 2017
Amkar Perm v Rubin Kazan
Arsenal v Spartak
CSKA v Anzhi
Krylia Sovetov v Terek
Loko Moscow v Ural
Rostov v Orenburg
Tom Tomsk v Krasnodar
Ufa v Zenit

(All dates subject to change)

All eyes back on Glasgow

Brendan Rodgers chose the right time to come to Glasgow. The new Celtic manager not only has a significant budget to pursue a sixth successive Scottish Premiership title, he has the eyes of the world back on the city again.

When Rangers won promotion last April by claiming the second-tier Championship, it made headlines everywhere. Seeing the name of a team which won a European trophy in 1972 will spark global interest, but the harsh reality is different.

Now, more than ever, sporting and financial accountability are under the greatest scrutiny.

"Rangers are back," people say. But it's not quite as simple as that. In fact, nothing has been simple since the summer of 2012, when Rangers went into liquidation. The club had debts of £134million, with money owed to everyone from the tax authorities (£94m) to a local florist (£70).

The biggest mistake about Rangers is saying they were "demoted" in 2012 for "financial irregularities." They were actually liquidated. A new company was allowed to start a team in the lowest (fourth) tier of the professional league in July 2012.

English businessman Charles Green bought the assets of the old Rangers for just £5.5m. This included Ibrox Stadium and the training ground, which are valued at £75m in the recent accounts of the new Rangers company. It seems bizarre that nothing was ever paid to all those owed money but the new company could keep expensive assets.

It has taken new Rangers four years to come through three lower divisions but an

Focus...Rangers' Martyn Waghorn (far right) and James Tavernier

KEY DATES
The league kicked off on August 6 and will end on the weekend of May 20/21. Defending champions Celtic will host Rangers on September 10, before travelling to Ibrox on December 31.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP 2016-17

1 Aberdeen
2 Celtic (Glasgow)
Partick Thistle
Rangers
3 Dundee
4 Hamilton Academical
5 Hearts (Edinburgh)
6 Inverness Caledonian Thistle
7 Kilmarnock
8 Motherwell
9 Ross County (Dingwall)
10 St Johnstone (Perth)

On the up...Shay Logan of Aberdeen

uncomfortable spin-off has been the backlash created by anyone suggesting this. Dundee player Gary Harkins was vilified for saying Rangers are a new club before a Scottish Cup tie at Ibrox last season.

The big issue for other supporters is about Rangers as a new club. Every other Scottish club which has gone into "administration" because of finances – Dundee, Motherwell, Dunfermline and Hearts – paid their tax debt. And Hearts supporters were forced to raise money in order to keep the Edinburgh club alive. Rangers just went into liquidation and paid nothing.

HMRC recently won an appeal case in court to reclaim unpaid tax from an offshore scheme that "old" Rangers operated from 2001-10 for loans to 80 players and managers, which was never repaid by players and now subject to tax.

The "new" Rangers has been over-spending just as badly. In the last two years, they have posted losses of £8.1m and £7.5m. Those figures look ridiculous compared to Aberdeen, whose turnover of £13m last season allowed them to challenge Celtic while still having wages at the 51 per cent ratio.

Rangers manager Mark Warburton has recruited former Croatia playmaker Nico Kranjcar from New York Cosmos and well-travelled midfielder Joey Barton from Burnley. Across the city, Rodgers has been using his contacts from his days as Liverpool manager to sign ex-Anfield defender Kolo Toure while pruning the squad inherited from Ronny Deila.

While Deila won two titles in his two seasons at Celtic, there were not enough signs of progress and the Norwegian's fate was decided by the Scottish Cup semi-final defeat on penalties to Rangers. That moment swept away any complacency at Celtic Park.

Aberdeen have pushed Celtic for the last two seasons, even conjuring up eight wins in the opening eight games last season to eclipse Alex Ferguson's record in 1985-86 when Aberdeen finished champions. And manager Derek McInnes says Aberdeen's plans for a new training ground and £40m stadium away from Pittodrie "will take the club to an unprecedented level".

Meanwhile, Hearts, with the addition of Scotland striker Tony Watt, will be hoping to repeat their third-place finish and believe they have little reason to fear Rangers, given that it was they who left the Ibrox team in their wake in the second tier in 2014-15.

Phil Gordon

> The biggest mistake about Rangers is saying they were "demoted" in 2012 for "financial irregularities". They were actually liquidated

Spotlight...new Celtic boss Brendan Rodgers

TALKING POINTS

- Leigh Griffiths' 40 goals last season saw him become the first Celtic striker to reach that landmark since Henrik Larsson's 53 in 2000-01. With the number of chances that the champions create, can he do it again?
- Having rejuvenated Aberdeen in his three years as manager, how long before an English club comes for Derek McInnes?
- Ross County won their first-ever trophy last season, beating Hibernian in the Scottish League Cup Final to earn Jim McIntyre the manager of the year. However, when neighbours Inverness failed to match their 2015 Scottish Cup triumph, their boss John Hughes quit.
- Kolo Toure is 35 while Joey Barton hits 34 in September. The Celtic defender and Rangers midfielder will both discover that Scotland is no "retirement home" as the pace of the game has caught out plenty of Premier League imports before.
- Neil Lennon won three Premiership titles as Celtic manager before an ill-fated move south of the border. Now in charge at second-tier Hibernian, his simple brief is to claim the one automatic promotion spot.

Pace...Celtic defender Kolo Toure is now 35

ONES TO WATCH

NICO KRANJCAR *(Rangers)*
He may be 31 and have flitted between teams since leaving Spurs in 2012, but the Croat has genuine quality and could be a fans' favourite.

PATRICK ROBERTS *(Celtic)*
The teen winger on loan from Manchester City has already lit up Celtic Park with his deft left foot, solo runs and goals.

ADAM ROONEY *(Aberdeen)*
Injury in February ended Aberdeen's title dreams but he still finished the club's top scorer with 28 goals – and he could be as prolific again.

TONY WATT *(Hearts)*
Struggled since leaving Celtic in 2014 for Standard Liege. Sent out on loan by Charlton Athletic and could rediscover his desire at Tynecastle.

MASSIMO DONATI *(Hamilton)*
Good midfielders at Hamilton usually go in the other direction, but the former Milan and Celtic man returns to Scotland at the age of 35.

Liga clubs look to a brighter future

Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi just can't be separated, and they can't be kept off the front pages either – not even when they go on holiday. There they were, in a port somewhere in Ibiza, and on newspaper covers all over Spain. With Messi's boat moored just metres from Ronaldo's boat, a meeting was imagined. "What would they talk about?" asked one editorial, with an open invitation for readers to insert their own punchline.

The new season, perhaps? Pretty much everyone else was – when they weren't picking through the bones of Spain's Euro 2016 exit.

At this time of year, everyone is optimistic, everyone has hope and everyone has a chance. Well, not everyone exactly, but you get the point. And the new campaign does begin with an optimism that is unusually widely spread in Spain.

For starters, it looks like this season might even kick off on time for a change – with seemingly no threat of strike action, no TV blackout, no fans protesting in the streets, no teams rescued or relegated off the pitch.

Historic... Liga president Javier Tebas

There are still problems to be confronted, of course. The on-going war between the federation and the league could yet claim more victims, and the way supporters are treated remains as scandalously bad as much of the TV coverage. But Spanish football has reduced its debt to players to almost zero, according to Liga de Futbol Profesional president Javier Tebas, who has been pursuing an aggressive policy of debt reduction over the last five years.

Some of the financial controls and penalties placed on clubs, which include salary limits and signings being suspended, as well as relegations, have not been popular. At times, there have even been accusations that they have not been uniformly applied. But now Tebas says the results have proven the approach to be the right one.

In 2010-11, 28 clubs had been formally reported for failing to pay players, with 341 complaints made and the total amount owed almost €90million. Five years on, there are just six clubs who have formal complaints against them and the total amount outstanding to players is €189,959.

Those six, Tebas insists, are not the all-too-common case of a club simply not paying; they are, rather, complaints where there is a disagreement over the interpretation of the contract and the amount owed. In other words, the clubs may yet be found to be right. "Right now, every Spanish club are up to date with their players, claims Tebas. "And I don't think that has ever happened in the history of Spanish football."

Nor is it just the players. In 2012, Spanish football's collective debt to the country's Inland Revenue stood at €643m. Now the figure is closer to €200m and Tebas says that, while deals that have been agreed between the state and clubs as part of their administration packages cannot be challenged, he hopes the figure will be zero by 2020.

Tebas described this as an historic moment, a chance to clean the slate and get it right. It goes hand in hand with, at last, a centrally controlled television deal and a policy of expansionism and a clearly stated intention to overhaul the Premier League.

It is good news, but first a warning: there is a long way to go and realistically they may not get there. They almost certainly will not, in fact. Not yet. And certainly not commercially, at least.

This summer has seen Spanish interest in the Premier League grow, not diminish. How could it not with Jose Mourinho against Pep Guardiola in Manchester and over 30 Spaniards playing in England? The money generated by English clubs dwarfs that of La Liga teams. Take Atletico Madrid, who aspire to take as much in domestic revenue as the teams relegated from the Premier League. Spanish players know that they can earn more in the Championship than at many top-flight teams in Spain.

Blonde ambition... Lionel Messi

Some of the improvements can be questioned too. For example, there is something tellingly superficial about new league rules that will see clubs punished if they do not fill those parts of the ground seen by the main camera on TV.

For all the efforts to make La Liga the product rather than just Real Madrid and Barcelona, those two clubs' dominance of supporterdom in Spain, where they account for over 60 per cent of fans and utterly dominate the media agenda, is ➤

PROMOTED TEAMS

OSASUNA
FInished sixth in last season's Segunda Division (and only on head-to-head record ahead of Alcorcon and Zaragoza) but won the play-offs.

ALAVES
"*Ya somos tres, solo falta Alaves*," used to be the chant from fans of Real Sociedad, Athletic Bilbao and Osasuna, the league's Basque clubs. It means "There are three of us now, all that's missing is Alaves." Well, Alaves are back a decade on, and with Eibar there too, there are now five of them in La Liga.

LEGANES
Nicknamed the "cucumbers", Leganes have promised to give every team they face a basket of the vegetable over the course of their first season in La Liga.

NEW COACHES

MAURICIO PELLEGRINO
(Alaves)
Former Rafa Benitez assistant left Argentina's Independiente to succeed Jose Bordalas at promoted Alaves.

GAIZKA GARITANO
(Deportivo La Coruna)
The man behind Eibar's promotion to the top flight in 2014 has taken charge in La Coruna.

QUIQUE SANCHEZ FLORES
(Espanyol)
The one-time Valencia and Atletico boss was not out of work for long after being sacked by Watford.

PACO JEMEZ
(Granada)
Hired by Granada's ambitious new Chinese owners to replace Jose Gonzalez in June after leaving relegated Rayo Vallecano.

JUANDE RAMOS
(Malaga)
The former Sevilla and Real Madrid coach is back in La Liga after his last job with Ukraine's Dnipro ended in 2014.

GUS POYET
(Real Betis)
The Uruguayan, whose last job was a spell at AEK in Athens, takes his first job in Spain.

JORGE SAMPAOLI
(Sevilla)
He won the 2015 Copa America as coach of Chile and now takes on his first job in Europe.

SPANISH LA LIGA 2016-17

1 Alaves *(Vitoria-Gasteiz)*
2 Athletic Bilbao
3 Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid
4 Barcelona
Espanyol
5 Celta Vigo
6 Deportivo La Coruna
7 Eibar
8 Granada
9 Las Palmas
10 Leganes
11 Malaga
12 Osasuna *(Pamplona)*
13 Real Betis *(Seville)*
Sevilla
14 Real Sociedad *(San Sebastian)*
15 Sporting Gijon
16 Valencia
17 Villarreal

an inescapable reality too. Internationally, where Tebas wants to expand, they dominate even more. Meanwhile, there are still very clear "Monday" clubs – those who are exiled to the same old TV graveyard slot time and again, their secondary status thus reinforced.

However, the reduction of debt has provided the stability from which Spain's footballing authorities claim they can grow. Base-rate salary caps will increase, for a start. The new collective deal brings more money to the country's "other" clubs – even if while that was being prepared, the announcement of the Premier League's new deal came as a huge threat – and so, of course, does the continuing ability to develop players.

It is the football itself that keeps Spanish clubs afloat. Spain's coaching is the best in Europe, all the way through the system, and there is a reason why there are so many Spanish players in the Premier League. English clubs, simultaneously a threat and a lifeline, provide a market for La Liga club's, a revenue stream. Now the hope is that they can aspire to more than just surviving. The books are starting to become more balanced, while foreign investment both reflects and enhances the sense that they can begin generating money.

For now, there's a certain optimism. Cautious perhaps, soon to be undone possibly, but it is there.

Maybe it is just the usual summer haze, the hope before it is inevitably taken from them, but there is something attractive about Spain next season. They have five teams in the Champions League again and have won the last six European club titles, as well as having two losing finalists.

Atletico Madrid, for a change, have not had their best players picked off, starting with Antoine Griezmann, who signed a new deal. Indeed their intention is to add to their team – and they are not alone.

Sevilla may have lost players, but there is excitement about them under new coach Jorge Sampaoli.

Espanyol, under new ownership and with Quique Sanchez Flores in charge, look like they may be worth keeping an eye on this term, Villarreal were European semi-finalists last year, and surely Valencia can't be as bad as they were last term?

Then there's the very top end. If Real Madrid's intention is usually to sign the star of a summer tournament, this year it wasn't possible. Mainly because Euro 2016's best players are already in Spain. The Copa America's best, even if he was defeated in the Final, is too.

Spain has Luis Suarez, Gareth Bale, Neymar, Modric, Iniesta and Griezmann. And of course Ronaldo and Messi – neighbours in Ibiza this summer, rivals in La Liga and beyond for another season.

Sid Lowe

Exiled...Villarreal and Sporting Gijon

> There are still very clear "Monday" clubs – those who are exiled to the same old TV graveyard slot

New...Sevilla's Matias Kranevitter (far left) and Joaquin Correa

TALKING POINTS

- Zinedine Zidane insists everyone at Real Madrid is important, but he knows the disadvantage of having a big, talented squad is that he has players – such as Isco and James Rodriguez – who expect to play. He must find a way of making them all feel important.
- Last season, Luis Enrique just about managed to keep his goalkeepers happy. This time, a definitive solution is needed. So who will be Barcelona's number one: Claudio Bravo or Marc Andre Ter Stegen?
- After eight years and more medals than anyone, just how much will Barca

Staying...Atletico's Antoine Griezmann (above centre)

miss Dani Alves, who has gone to Juventus?

- Jorge Sampaoli's Sevilla promise to be a very different team to that of Unai Emery, who won the last three Europa League titles. There will be excitement but, if results don't follow quickly, patience may wear thin.
- This could be a season of surprises, with Malaga, Granada and Espanyol all likely to be worth watching.
- Valencia fans demand that their side compete with the best, but failure to make the Champions League means costs have had to be reduced and there are also internal divisions to deal with.

Worth watching... Espanyol (in blue)

- At the end of the Champions League Final, Diego Simeone looked sunk and hinted that he might walk away. For days, everyone at Atletico Madrid panicked and there were even fans outside the stadium, pleading with him to stay. In the end, he did, and he's back for more as he attempts the most difficult task of all.
- At the end of last season, Getafe and Rayo Vallecano both went down, reducing the capital's quota by half. But along came Leganes, from the southern satellite town, to nudge it back to three. Can they keep their place in the top flight?

ONES TO WATCH

CRISTIANO RONALDO
(Real Madrid)
Always one to watch and now there's an extra intrigue. Will the Euro 2016 success change him in any way?

NANI
(Valencia)
"Nani has big balls," says Phil Neville, and performing a *capoeira* at his presentation suggests he's right. But Mestalla is not an easy place to play.

LIONEL MESSI
(Barcelona)
Convicted of tax evasion, beaten in another Final, retired from international football – he will be eager to return to club action.

JOSE NARANJO
(Celta Vigo)
The 21-year-old will replace Nolito on the left side of the attack, from where he'll cut inside and go at defenders. He scored 16 goals last season.

LUIS SUAREZ
(Barcelona)
Last term he became the first man to win the Pichichi title other than Ronaldo or Messi in seven years and was also the top provider of assists.

SAMUEL UMTITI
(Barcelona)
The 22-year-old cried on finding out Barca wanted him, but there have been plenty of tears before over the club's past central-defensive signings...

ANTOINE GRIEZMANN
(Atletico Madrid)
One of the best three players in the world, according to coach Diego Simeone, and perhaps he proved it in France.

GARETH BALE
(Real Madrid)
Twenty-seven and still growing in confidence and taking on greater responsibility. The only thing missing last season was full fitness.

JOSE ANTONIO REYES
(Espanyol)
If Quique Sanchez Flores can get the best out of him at Espanyol, there are few as exciting. Or as infuriating.

ANDRE GOMES
(Barcelona)
The Euro-winning midfielder chose Barca over Real Madrid and could eventually earn former club Valencia up to €55m.

Aug 28...Eibar v Valencia

Oct 23... Celta Vigo v Deportivo La Coruna

FIXTURES

FRIDAY, AUGUST 19, 2016

Dep La Coruna v Eibar
Malaga v Osasuna

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 2016

Barcelona v Real Betis
Granada v Villarreal
Sevilla v Espanyol

SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 2016

Atletico Madrid v Alaves
Real Sociedad v Real Madrid
Sporting Gijon v Athletic Bilbao

MONDAY, AUGUST 22, 2016

Celta Vigo v Leganes
Valencia v Las Palmas

SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2016

Alaves v Sporting Gijon
Athletic Bilbao v Barcelona
Eibar v Valencia
Espanyol v Malaga
Las Palmas v Granada
Leganes v Atletico Madrid
Osasuna v Real Sociedad
Real Betis v Dep La Coruna
Real Madrid v Celta Vigo
Villarreal v Sevilla

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2016

Barcelona v Alaves
Celta Vigo v Atletico Madrid
Dep La Coruna v Athletic Bilbao
Granada v Eibar
Malaga v Villarreal
Real Madrid v Osasuna
Real Sociedad v Espanyol
Sevilla v Las Palmas
Sporting Gijon v Leganes
Valencia v Real Betis

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2016

Alaves v Dep La Coruna
Athletic Bilbao v Valencia
Atletico Madrid v Sporting Gijon
Eibar v Sevilla
Espanyol v Real Madrid
Las Palmas v Malaga
Leganes v Barcelona
Osasuna v Celta Vigo
Real Betis v Granada
Villarreal v Real Sociedad

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2016

Barcelona v Atletico Madrid
Celta Vigo v Sporting Gijon
Dep La Coruna v Leganes
Granada v Athletic Bilbao
Malaga v Eibar
Osasuna v Espanyol
Real Madrid v Villarreal
Real Sociedad v Las Palmas
Sevilla v Real Betis
Valencia v Alaves

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2016

Alaves v Granada
Athletic Bilbao v Sevilla
Atletico Madrid v Dep La Coruna
Eibar v Real Sociedad
Espanyol v Celta Vigo
Las Palmas v Real Madrid
Leganes v Valencia
Real Betis v Malaga
Sporting Gijon v Barcelona
Villarreal v Osasuna

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2016

Celta Vigo v Barcelona
Dep La Coruna v Sporting Gijon
Espanyol v Villarreal
Granada v Leganes
Malaga v Athletic Bilbao
Osasuna v Las Palmas
Real Madrid v Eibar
Real Sociedad v Real Betis
Sevilla v Alaves
Valencia v Atletico Madrid

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2016

Alaves v Malaga
Athletic Bilbao v Real Sociedad
Atletico Madrid v Granada
Barcelona v Dep La Coruna
Eibar v Osasuna
Las Palmas v Espanyol
Leganes v Sevilla
Real Betis v Real Madrid
Sporting Gijon v Valencia
Villarreal v Celta Vigo

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2016

Celta Vigo v Dep La Coruna
Espanyol v Eibar
Granada v Sporting Gijon
Malaga v Leganes
Osasuna v Real Betis
Real Madrid v Athletic Bilbao
Real Sociedad v Alaves
Sevilla v Atletico Madrid
Valencia v Barcelona
Villarreal v Las Palmas

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2016

Alaves v Real Madrid
Athletic Bilbao v Osasuna
Atletico Madrid v Malaga
Barcelona v Granada
Dep La Coruna v Valencia
Eibar v Villarreal
Las Palmas v Celta Vigo
Leganes v Real Sociedad
Real Betis v Espanyol
Sporting Gijon v Sevilla

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2016

Celta Vigo v Valencia
Espanyol v Athletic Bilbao
Granada v Dep La Coruna
Las Palmas v Eibar
Malaga v Sporting Gijon
Osasuna v Alaves
Real Madrid v Leganes
Real Sociedad v Atletico Madrid
Sevilla v Barcelona
Villarreal v Real Betis

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2016

Alaves v Espanyol
Athletic Bilbao v Villarreal
Atletico Madrid v Real Madrid
Barcelona v Malaga
Dep La Coruna v Sevilla
Eibar v Celta Vigo
Leganes v Osasuna
Real Betis v Las Palmas
Sporting Gijon v Real Sociedad
Valencia v Granada

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2016

Celta Vigo v Granada
Eibar v Real Betis
Espanyol v Leganes
Las Palmas v Athletic Bilbao
Malaga v Dep La Coruna
Osasuna v Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid v Sporting Gijon
Real Sociedad v Barcelona
Sevilla v Valencia
Villarreal v Alaves

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016

Alaves v Las Palmas
Athletic Bilbao v Eibar
Atletico Madrid v Espanyol
Barcelona v Real Madrid
Dep La Coruna v Real Sociedad
Granada v Sevilla
Leganes v Villarreal
Real Betis v Celta Vigo
Sporting Gijon v Osasuna
Valencia v Malaga

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2016

Celta Vigo v Sevilla
Eibar v Alaves
Espanyol v Sporting Gijon
Las Palmas v Leganes
Malaga v Granada
Osasuna v Barcelona
Real Betis v Athletic Bilbao
Real Madrid v Dep La Coruna
Real Sociedad v Valencia
Villarreal v Atletico Madrid

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2016

Alaves v Real Betis
Athletic Bilbao v Celta Vigo
Atletico Madrid v Las Palmas
Barcelona v Espanyol
Dep La Coruna v Osasuna
Granada v Real Sociedad
Leganes v Eibar
Sevilla v Malaga
Sporting Gijon v Villarreal
Valencia v Real Madrid

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2017

Athletic Bilbao v Alaves
Celta Vigo v Malaga
Eibar v Atletico Madrid
Espanyol v Dep La Coruna
Las Palmas v Sporting Gijon
Osasuna v Valencia
Real Betis v Leganes
Real Madrid v Granada
Real Sociedad v Sevilla
Villarreal v Barcelona

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2017

Atletico Madrid v Real Betis
Barcelona v Las Palmas
Celta Vigo v Alaves
Dep La Coruna v Villarreal
Granada v Osasuna
Leganes v Athletic Bilbao
Malaga v Real Sociedad
Sevilla v Real Madrid
Sporting Gijon v Eibar
Valencia v Espanyol

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2017

Alaves v Leganes
Athletic Bilbao v Atletico Madrid
Eibar v Barcelona
Espanyol v Granada
Las Palmas v Dep La Coruna
Osasuna v Sevilla
Real Betis v Sporting Gijon
Real Madrid v Malaga
Real Sociedad v Celta Vigo
Villarreal v Valencia

SUNDAY, JANUARY 29, 2017

Alaves v Atletico Madrid
Athletic Bilbao v Sporting Gijon
Eibar v Dep La Coruna
Espanyol v Sevilla
Las Palmas v Valencia

Dec 4...Granada v Sevilla

Apr 9...Real Madrid v Atletico Madrid

Leganes v Celta Vigo
Osasuna v Malaga
Real Betis v Barcelona
Real Madrid v Real Sociedad
Villarreal v Granada

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2017

Atletico Madrid v Leganes
Barcelona v Athletic Bilbao
Celta Vigo v Real Madrid
Dep La Coruna v Real Betis
Granada v Las Palmas
Malaga v Espanyol
Real Sociedad v Osasuna
Sevilla v Villarreal
Sporting Gijon v Alaves
Valencia v Eibar

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2017

Alaves v Barcelona
Athletic Bilbao v Dep La Coruna
Atletico Madrid v Celta Vigo
Eibar v Granada
Espanyol v Real Sociedad
Las Palmas v Sevilla
Leganes v Sporting Gijon
Osasuna v Real Madrid
Real Betis v Valencia
Villarreal v Malaga

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2017

Barcelona v Leganes
Celta Vigo v Osasuna
Dep La Coruna v Alaves
Granada v Real Betis
Malaga v Las Palmas
Real Madrid v Espanyol
Real Sociedad v Villarreal
Sevilla v Eibar
Sporting Gijon v Atletico Madrid
Valencia v Athletic Bilbao

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2017

Alaves v Valencia
Athletic Bilbao v Granada
Atletico Madrid v Barcelona
Eibar v Malaga
Espanyol v Osasuna
Las Palmas v Real Sociedad
Leganes v Dep La Coruna
Real Betis v Sevilla
Sporting Gijon v Celta Vigo
Villarreal v Real Madrid

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2017

Barcelona v Sporting Gijon
Celta Vigo v Espanyol
Dep La Coruna v Atletico Madrid
Granada v Alaves
Malaga v Real Betis
Osasuna v Villarreal
Real Madrid v Las Palmas
Real Sociedad v Eibar
Sevilla v Athletic Bilbao
Valencia v Leganes

SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 2017

Alaves v Sevilla
Athletic Bilbao v Malaga
Atletico Madrid v Valencia
Barcelona v Celta Vigo
Eibar v Real Madrid
Las Palmas v Osasuna
Leganes v Granada
Real Betis v Real Sociedad
Sporting Gijon v Dep La Coruna
Villarreal v Espanyol

SUNDAY, MARCH 12, 2017

Celta Vigo v Villarreal
Dep La Coruna v Barcelona
Espanyol v Las Palmas
Granada v Atletico Madrid
Malaga v Alaves
Osasuna v Eibar
Real Madrid v Real Betis
Real Sociedad v Athletic Bilbao
Sevilla v Leganes
Valencia v Sporting Gijon

SUNDAY, MARCH 19, 2017

Alaves v Real Sociedad
Athletic Bilbao v Real Madrid
Atletico Madrid v Sevilla
Barcelona v Valencia
Dep La Coruna v Celta Vigo
Eibar v Espanyol
Las Palmas v Villarreal
Leganes v Malaga
Real Betis v Osasuna
Sporting Gijon v Granada

SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2017

Celta Vigo v Las Palmas
Espanyol v Real Betis
Granada v Barcelona
Malaga v Atletico Madrid
Osasuna v Athletic Bilbao
Real Madrid v Alaves
Real Sociedad v Leganes
Sevilla v Sporting Gijon
Valencia v Dep La Coruna
Villarreal v Eibar

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2017

Alaves v Osasuna
Athletic Bilbao v Espanyol
Atletico Madrid v Real Sociedad
Barcelona v Sevilla
Dep La Coruna v Granada
Eibar v Las Palmas
Leganes v Real Madrid
Real Betis v Villarreal
Sporting Gijon v Malaga
Valencia v Celta Vigo

SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2017

Celta Vigo v Eibar
Espanyol v Alaves
Granada v Valencia
Las Palmas v Real Betis
Malaga v Barcelona
Osasuna v Leganes
Real Madrid v Atletico Madrid
Real Sociedad v Sporting Gijon
Sevilla v Dep La Coruna
Villarreal v Athletic Bilbao

SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2017

Alaves v Villarreal
Athletic Bilbao v Las Palmas
Atletico Madrid v Osasuna
Barcelona v Real Sociedad
Dep La Coruna v Malaga
Granada v Celta Vigo
Leganes v Espanyol
Real Betis v Eibar
Sporting Gijon v Real Madrid
Valencia v Sevilla

SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2017

Celta Vigo v Real Betis
Eibar v Athletic Bilbao
Espanyol v Atletico Madrid
Las Palmas v Alaves
Malaga v Valencia
Osasuna v Sporting Gijon
Real Madrid v Barcelona
Real Sociedad v Dep La Coruna
Sevilla v Granada
Villarreal v Leganes

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 2017

Alaves v Eibar
Athletic Bilbao v Real Betis
Atletico Madrid v Villarreal
Barcelona v Osasuna
Dep La Coruna v Real Madrid
Granada v Malaga
Leganes v Las Palmas
Sevilla v Celta Vigo
Sporting Gijon v Espanyol
Valencia v Real Sociedad

SUNDAY, APRIL 30, 2017

Celta Vigo v Athletic Bilbao
Eibar v Leganes
Espanyol v Barcelona
Las Palmas v Atletico Madrid
Malaga v Sevilla
Osasuna v Dep La Coruna
Real Betis v Alaves
Real Madrid v Valencia
Real Sociedad v Granada
Villarreal v Sporting Gijon

SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2017

Alaves v Athletic Bilbao
Atletico Madrid v Eibar
Barcelona v Villarreal
Dep La Coruna v Espanyol
Granada v Real Madrid
Leganes v Real Betis
Malaga v Celta Vigo
Sevilla v Real Sociedad
Sporting Gijon v Las Palmas
Valencia v Osasuna

SUNDAY, MAY 14, 2017

Alaves v Celta Vigo
Athletic Bilbao v Leganes
Eibar v Sporting Gijon
Espanyol v Valencia
Las Palmas v Barcelona
Osasuna v Granada
Real Betis v Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid v Sevilla
Real Sociedad v Malaga
Villarreal v Dep La Coruna

SUNDAY, MAY 21, 2017

Atletico Madrid v Athletic Bilbao
Barcelona v Eibar
Celta Vigo v Real Sociedad
Dep La Coruna v Las Palmas
Granada v Espanyol
Leganes v Alaves
Malaga v Real Madrid
Sevilla v Osasuna
Sporting Gijon v Real Betis
Valencia v Villarreal

(All dates subject to change)

Military coup casts shadow over new campaign

The fall-out from July's attempted military coup has hit football, with champions Besiktas particularly affected. Star striker Mario Gomez and Argentinian playmaker Jose Sosa both quit the club ahead of the new campaign, citing safety reasons for their departures.

Gomez was one of the key players in his side's title victory in May, when he finished as the league's top scorer with 26 goals. But he returned to Germany following the unsettling events that saw an attempt to unseat state president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "The reason for this is completely down to the political situation," Gomez said. "There are no sporting or any other reasons that have made me make this decision. It is purely down to the terrible events that happened in the last few days."

Sosa also departed, citing fears for his

Coup...the army in Istanbul's Taksim Square

TURKISH SUPER LIG 2016-17

1 Adanaspor
2 Akhisar Belediyespor
3 Alanyaspor
4 Antalyaspor
5 Besiktas *(Istanbul)*
Fenerbahce
Galatasaray
Istanbul BB
Kasimpasa
6 Bursaspor
7 Caykur Rizespor
8 Gaziantepspor
9 Genclerbirligi *(Ankara)*
Osmanlispor
10 Karabukspor
11 Kayserispor
12 Konyaspor
13 Trabzonspor

ONES TO WATCH

ADRIANO
(Besiktas)
Tired of warming the bench at Barcelona, the 31-year-old Brazilian wing-back has opted for a far more active role with the Black Eagles.

BRUMA
(Galatasaray)
The Portuguese winger has flattered to deceive, but since returning from a loan spell at Real Sociedad he has impressed in pre-season.

ONUR KIVRAK
(Trabzonspor)
Although an unused goalkeeping sub for Turkey at Euro 2016, the 28-year-old is international class. Alert and agile, he is his club's captain.

MARTIN SKRTEL
(Fenerbahce)
After falling down the pecking order at Liverpool, the gritty Slovakian defender is hoping to relaunch his club career in the Super Lig.

EDIN VISCA
(Istanbul BB)
Clever little Bosnian right-winger whose 16 goals last term were the cornerstone of his club's best-ever season as they finished fourth.

KEY DATES
The season starts on August 20 and runs until May 20, 2017. Key early games include Besiktas v Galatasaray (September 20) and Fenerbahce v Galatasaray (November 19).

Gone... Besiktas' Mario Gomez (far left) and Jose Sosa

family's safety following the terrorist suicide bombing attack at Ataturk airport in June: "I asked to leave Besiktas. I did it because of personal problems with my family. My wife is afraid to live in Istanbul, Turkey, and I'm afraid for my children."

Cynics, including Besiktas goalkeeper Tolga Zengin, claimed the pair had other reasons to bail out, with Sosa linked to a possible transfer to Milan.

There was a more direct link between football and the recent political upheaval when Fenerbahce president Aziz Yildirim accused coup plotters of fabricating match-fixing allegations against him in 2011.

Yildirim spent a year in jail as he awaited trial and his club were banned from competing in European football for two seasons. The trial was the culmination of an investigation by prosecutor Zekeriya Oz, who was allegedly linked to the Gulen Movement, the "parallel structure" behind the coup.

Yildirim and six others were acquitted last year on charges of match-fixing, two years after they were released from prison.

The 62-year-old Yildirim, who has presided over the country's best-supported club since 1998, was cleared after new prosecutors replaced the Gulen-linked judges and found that the charges against him were based on insufficient evidence. Yildirim maintained his innocence throughout the trial, claiming that evidence, including wiretapped conversations allegedly revealing match-fixing deals, was faked.

"The match-fixing allegations were an operation staged by a group who want to take over the country," claims Yildirim.

"Only the president fought against it. Mehmet Berk [a judge who was assigned to the match-fixing case] said it to my face. He said to me that if Fenerbahce had not won the title in the 2011 season, we would not have carried out such an operation."

Another casualty of the coup attempt was a charity match organised by Samuel Eto'o in aid of his foundation. Lionel Messi and Andres Iniesta were among players who were due to play in the match in Antalya, where Eto'o now plays.

The cancellation of the match was another indicator of the problems that Turkish football may now face in attracting top-class players.

John Holmesdale

Double...Emmanuel Emenike (no29) was on target twice for Fenerbahce in their home Champions League qualifier against Monaco

TALKING POINTS

- In the wake of Konyaspor's over-achieving efforts last season, when they ended up third, all eyes will be on the Anatolian club to see if they can write another fairy-tale chapter and challenge title favourites Besiktas and Fenerbahce. Coach Aykut Kocaman insists they can and 25,000 season-ticket holders agree.
- A pitiful sixth last time out, Galatasaray have rarely fallen so low and coach Jan Olde Riekerink has a host of problems to solve: too many star names past their prime, a leaky back line and mediocre home form.
- Fenerbahce welcomed new defensive reinforcements in Martin Skrtel, Roman Neustadter and Gregory Van der Wiel. But there were doubts over the future of Dutch striker Robin Van Persie, who was reportedly of interest to several Premier League clubs.

Fairy tale... Aykut Kocaman

- How long can Fenerbahce hang on to Ozan Tufan? The midfielder was one of the few Turkish players to emerge with credit from a disappointing Euro 2016 campaign and has been heavily linked with a move to a wealthier club in western Europe.

Albania

Superliga

By Nick Bidwell

KEY DATES

The new season gets underway on September 7 and will finish on June 2.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Partizani Tirana replaced Andrea Agostinelli with ex-Watford assistant **Adolfo Sormani**. Former Partizani and Teuta Durres boss Hasan Lika is now in the Kukesi hot-seat.

Austria

Bundesliga

By Brian Homewood

KEY DATES

The season began on July 23, 2016 and is scheduled to end on May 28, 2017. On August 27, Rapid Vienna host Red Bull Salzburg, and on September 17 Red Bull Salzburg are at home to Austria Vienna.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Rapid Vienna replaced Zoran Barisic with **Mike Buskens** and the 48-year-old German says he wants to make his side "very awkward opponents".

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Premier League

By Sasa Ibrulj

KEY DATES

The new-look 12-team league started on July 23 and will take a winter break from December 3 until February 25. After 22 rounds of the regular season, teams will be split in to two championship groups, with the competition ending on May 27.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Despite having led only one senior club previously, and spending most of his career working with youth sides, Slovenian coach Milos Kostic was put in charge of Zeljeznicar. As one of the most popular clubs in the country, the pressure on him will be huge.

Bulgaria

First Professional Football League

By Rumen Paytashev

KEY DATES

This will be the first campaign in which the 14 clubs play each other home and away, before the league then splits into championship and relegation groups. The season began on July 29 with everything being resolved by June 4.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Lyupko Petrovic returned to take charge of Levski Sofia for a third time, while **Georgi Ivanov** took charge of Cherno More Varna.

Croatia

Prva HNL

By Sasa Ibrulji

KEY DATES

The league began on July 15 and it is expected to end on May 27. Dinamo Zagreb will face rivals Hajduk Split four times: on August 10, October 1, December 17 and April 22.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Former national boss **Zlatko Kranjcar** replaced Zoran Mamic at Dinamo Zagreb, while Marijan Pusnik took over from Damir Buric at Hajduk Split.

Cyprus

First Division

By Nick Bidwell

KEY DATES

The regular season runs from August 19 to March 3, after which the top six and bottom six split into championship and relegation groups. In the Nicosia derby, Omonia host APOEL on December 12, with the reverse fixture taking place on the last day of the opening phase.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

AEK Larnaca boss Thomas Christiansen was headhunted by champions, APOEL, while former Newcastle United coach **John Carver** is now in charge at Omonia.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Champions for the past six years, Skenderbeu Korce remain a class apart, though last season they were guilty of going through the motions at times. Partizani Tirana should be their closest rivals, while big-spending Kukesi could also be in the mix.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
Back in the top flight for the first time in 54 years, Korabi Peshkopi will be hampered by having to play home games in Tirana as their own ground was deemed unfit for the Superliga. Flamurtari, who once beat Barcelona in the UEFA Cup, could be in danger too.

ONE TO WATCH
Partizani keeper **Alban Hoxha** kept 19 clean sheets in the league last season. Unused at Euro 2016, he is pushing hard to replace current Albanian first-choice Etrit Berisha.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Kukesi's midfield looks all the stronger for acquiring the experienced Montenegrin schemer Marko Scepanovic from Podgorica Mladost. Tall and technically good, he has a fine goalscoring record.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Red Bull Salzburg will expect to dominate but Rapid Vienna, with a new coach and their new Allianz Stadion home, have dreams of a first title since 2008. Austria Vienna will play in the Ernst Happel stadium while their ground is renovated and may struggle.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
Back in the top flight for the first time in 22 years, St Polten will hope to avoid a swift return to the second tier. Mattersburg, who finished one place above the relegation zone last time, could be down there again.

ONE TO WATCH
Salzburg's **Jonathan Soriano** has been the league's leading scorer for the last three seasons, with 160 goals in 173 games in all competitions.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Moanes Dabour, who scored 18 goals for Grasshoppers in the Swiss league last season, joined Salzburg for €6m, making him the most expensive signing by an Austrian club before the season began.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Last season's winners Zrinjski Mostar start as favourites but their rivals will be encouraged by the fact that only one club – Zeljeznicar in 2013 – have successfully defended the title in the last 15 years. Seven different clubs have won the championship in that period.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
Vitez and Celik Zenica face a tough season, while Olimpic Sarajevo, Metalleghe-BSI and Krupa could also struggle.

ONE TO WATCH
Haris Duljevic is a 22-year-old winger who plays for Sarajevo and has impressed for the last two seasons. He has made his international debut and is expected to lead his club in a title challenge.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Zeljeznicar's signing of Spanish midfielder **Javier Hervas** from Brisbane Roar was considered a spectacular move.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Ludogorets will attempt to win a sixth successive title, with Levski Sofia and Beroe Stara Zagora – who were second and third last time out – best placed to stop them. It will be interesting to see if CSKA Sofia can be competitive after moving up from the third tier.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
Neftochimic and Vereya went up due to the expansion of the top flight so they will be among those favoured to go back down. Pirin and Montana also look likely candidates for a relegation scrap.

ONE TO WATCH
Anete is a 30-year-old Spanish striker who has returned to Levski Sofia after a season in Azerbaijan with Neftci.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Todor Nedelev is back at Botev Plovdiv on loan from Mainz after finding playing time hard to come by in Germany.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Dinamo Zagreb, who won their 11th consecutive title last term are favourites, while Hajduk Split could be pushed for second place by improving **HNK Rijeka**.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
Newcomers Cibalia will expect a relegation battle and the same goes for RNK Split and Istra 1961 – whose coaches both resigned after their opening games of the season.

ONE TO WATCH
Dinamo Zagreb's 22-year-old midfielder **Marko Rog** made a good impression for Croatia against Spain in France this summer and could be set for a good campaign.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
With hardly any newcomers to the Croatian league, the biggest move saw Dinamo Zagreb pick up €23m from Juventus for Marko Pjaca, and it will be fascinating to see how the 21-year-old winger gets on in Italy.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
APOEL have won the last four Cypriot titles and are the best the island has to offer. AEK, Apollon and Anorthosis are the next best.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
After signing 13 new players and off-loading 15, recently arrived AEL boss Pambos Christodoulou may have problems trying to find the right blend. The promoted trio of Karmiotissa, AEZ and Anagennisi all look vulnerable.

ONE TO WATCH
Anorthosis' free-scoring South African striker Dino Ndlovu scored 16 goals in 24 games for the Famagusta side last term and is attracting plenty of continental mainstream interest.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
APOEL should benefit from the vast experience of striker **Igor De Camargo**. The 33-year-old's past clubs include Genk and Standard Liege.

Czech Republic

First League

By Sam Beckwith

KEY DATES

Starting on July 29, the season runs until May 27, with a break from December 4 to February 17. Early games include Sparta Prague v Slavia Prague on September 24 and Viktoria Plzen v Sparta on October 22.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Mlada Boleslav will be looking for a new coach from August 25, when **Karel Jarolim** leaves to become national-team boss. Roman Pivarnik takes over at Viktoria Plzen.

Denmark

Superliga

By Jim Holden

KEY DATES

The campaign started on July 15 and there is a mid-season break from December 11 to February 19. After March 19, the league will split into play-off sections, with the top six competing for the title and the rest to avoid relegation. Dates for these matches are not yet confirmed.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

German coach Alexander Zorniger has taken over at Brondby after a previous spell at Stuttgart. English veteran Colin Todd is now boss of Esbjerg after four years at Randers. His replacement there is Icelandic coach Olafur Kristjansson.

Hungary

Nemzeti Bajnoksag I

By Peterjon Cresswell

KEY DATES

The season runs from July 16 until May 27, with a winter break from December 10 to February 18. The derby games between Ferencvaros and Ujpest take place on September 24, April 4 and May 27.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Ferenc Horvath joined Diosgyor from Videoton, where he was replaced by **Henning Berg** of Norway. Ferenc Bene left promoted Gyirmot, who went for Istvan Urbanyi.

Israel

Premier League

By Nick Bidwell

KEY DATES

The season runs from August 20 to March 10, then splits into championship and relegation pools. In early games, **Maccabi Tel Aviv** face Hapoel Tel Aviv on September 23.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Ex-Ajax and Georgia striker Shota Arveladze has taken over from Dutch coach Peter Bosz at Maccabi Tel Aviv. Ran Ben Shimon, a title winner with Ironi Kiryat Shmona in 2011-12, replaced Slobodan Drapic at Beitar Jerusalem.

Macedonia

First League

By Milorad Stojmanovski

KEY DATES

The championship started on August 7 and will finish on May 28, with a mid-season break from December 4 to February 19. Last term's top two, Vardar and Shkendija, meet on August 14 and October 23.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

The major change was at Rabotnicki, where former international Viktor Trenevski replaced Tomislav Franc, who is now his assistant, following their elimination from the Europa League.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
A two-horse race involving Viktoria Plzen and Sparta Prague looks likely. Plzen have a settled but ageing squad, while Sparta have brought in defender Michal Kadlec but lost winger Ladislav Krejci. Wealthy Slavia Prague are potential dark horses.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
New boys Karvina could struggle after losing their main sponsor, while Hradec Kralove, also promoted last season, are a classic yo-yo club. Pribram only stayed up thanks to a 0-0 draw with Jablonec on the last day of the season. Zlin and Jihlava are also in danger.

ONE TO WATCH
Ales Cermak, Sparta Prague's 21-year-old attacking midfielder returns after two-and-a-half years out on loan and looks set to make a big impact.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
The summer's biggest signing was 23-year-old striker Gino Van Kessel, who moved from Trencin to Slavia Prague. The Dutch-born Curacaoan is the Czech League's third-most expensive signing of all time, with the deal reported to be worth £990,000.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Copenhagen are massive favourites to retain their title. Nordsjaelland look revitalised after Kasper Hjulmand returned as coach last January, while **Midtjylland** have the highly rated Jess Thorup in charge.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
With a complicated new relegation play-off system in operation for the first time, any side from seventh to 14th is vulnerable, with the bottom four going into a semi-final showdown. The promoted trio of Horsens, Silkeborg and Lyngby appear to be the weakest links.

ONE TO WATCH
Paraguayan striker Federico Santander scored 14 goals in his first season at Copenhagen and he could be even more impressive this time. Pione Sisto was predicted to continue to shine Midtjylland – but they sold him to Celta Vigo.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
The biggest fee paid before the season got underway was the £1m Copenhagen parted with for Slovakia midfielder **Jan Gregus** from Jablonec.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Boasting several members of the country's Euro 2016 team, Ferencvaros are favourites to retain the title. Videoton and Debrecen will be their strongest challengers, while the return of international midfielder Akos Elek could make Diosgyor the surprise package.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
Promoted pair Gyirmot and Mezokovesd will do well to avoid a quick return to NBII, although Vasas – who only just survived last season – are likely to be scrapping down at the bottom with them.

ONE TO WATCH
Now staking his place in the Ferencvaros midfield, 21-year-old Dominik Nagy will be hoping to emulate his namesake Adam Nagy, who starred at the Euro finals and earned a move to Bologna. Both were part of the impressive Hungary side at the Under-20 World Cup in 2015.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
A past Polish title-winner with Lech Poznan, Gergo Lovrencsics impressed in Hungary's 3-3 draw with Portugal at Euro 2016. He will give Ferencvaros added pace and width.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Under coach Barak Bakhar, champions Hapoel Be'er Sheva boast a resilience and unity. The big-hitters of Maccabi Tel Aviv, who signed Yossi Benayoun from Maccabi Haifa, have more star quality, but will miss the goals of China-bound striker Eran Zahavi.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
Hapoel Kfar Saba only scored 22 goals in 33 top-flight games last term and will continue to struggle if that is not remedied. Only one step away from relegation in each of the past two campaigns, Hapoel Haifa's luck could well run out.

ONE TO WATCH
Nigerian attacking midfielder John Ogu of Hapoel Be'er Sheva was deservedly voted the best foreign player in Israel last season. The towering 28-year-old previously played for Leiria and Academica in Portugal.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Following an excellent first season with Beitar Jerusalem, Australian international winger **Nikita Rukavytsya** was snapped up by Maccabi Haifa.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Vardar and **Shkendija** will compete for the title again. Vardar coach Goce Sedloski has put this faith in young talent, while Shkendija have stuck with last season's team and kept captain Ferhan Hasani.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
Newly-promoted Makedonija GP and Pobeda – who are both former champions – are likely to be in a relegation battle with Renova. Pobeda will not be helped by having to play home games away from their Goce Delchev stadium in Prilep while it undergoes renovation.

ONE TO WATCH
Shkendija's 21-year-old **Marjan Radeski** has already won seven caps and scored in June's friendly against Azerbaijan.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Vardar signed two South American strikers, Jonathan Balotelli from Brazil and Colombia's Jhon Obregon, along with Macedonia's under-21 goalkeeper Igor Aleksovski.

Malta

Premier League

By Dominic Aquilina

KEY DATES

The league will run from August 19 until May 6, with the FA Trophy Final on May 20. Valletta face geographical neighbours Floriana on September 21, and then Hibernians four days later.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

The one big change was at Hibernians, where English coach Mark Miller replaced Branko Nisevic, who took over newly promoted Gzira United.

Moldova

National Division

By Miron Goihman

KEY DATES

The season started on July 23 and will finish at the end of May. Eleven teams play each other three times and the winter break will run from December 10 until February 24.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

French coach Bruno Irles took charge of defending champions Sheriff, while runners-up Dacia Chisinau sacked Oleg Bejenari after an unsuccesful Europa League qualification campaign. Vlad Goian was named coach of Cup-winners Zaria Balti.

Montenegro

First League

By Dejan Panic

KEY DATES

The season kicked off on August 6 and will break for winter on December 3. The spring season will begin in late February or early March, with the dates to be determined by the FA in December.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Aleksandar Nedovic joined Petrovac from Sutjeska, who replaced him with Nebojsa Jovovic, a former sports director of Buducnost.

Northern Ireland

NIFL Premiership

By Roy Kitson

KEY DATES

The season started on August 6 and finishes at the end of April. Key early matches include **Cliftonville** v **Linfield** on September 3.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Kieran Harding has taken over at Carrick Rangers, while Gavin Dykes took charge of Ballinamallard United.

Poland

Ekstraklasa

By Dariusz Kurowski

KEY DATES

The regular season runs from July 15 to April 23, with a break between December 20 and February 9. The league then splits into championship and relegation groups, which see a further seven matches for each team, from April 28 to June 4.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Stanislav Cherchesov left Legia Warsaw and was replaced by **Besnik Hasi**. Radoslav Latal left runners-up Piast Gliwice by mutual agreement.

Romania

Liga 1

By Emanuel Rosu

KEY DATES

The league began on July 22 and will end with the play-offs from May 13 to June 4. The mid-season break runs from December 17 to February 4. Steaua are at home to Dinamo on August 30 and Astra on September 10.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Mircea Rednic left Dinamo and was replaced by **Ioan Andone**. At Pandurii, Edward Iordanescu quit over the club's financial problems and Petre Grigoras took charge for a third time.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Defending champions Valletta, **Birkirkara** and Hibernians will battle for the title. Birkirkara could be worth watching after they beat Hearts in the Europa League.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
The two promoted sides, Gzira United and Hamrun Spartans, will both settle for staying up this season.

ONE TO WATCH
Balzan striker Lydon Micallef's performances last season were a joy to watch and he signalled his intentions of making it to the national side with both goals in a 2-1 win in Baku against Neftchi in the Europa League.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Hibernians signed Malta's first-choice keeper **Andrew Hogg** from Kalloni of Greece after a contractual dispute with his former employer.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
In addition to champions **Sheriff**, Dacia and **Zimbru Chisinau**, who finished second and third respectively last season, Milsami Orhei and Zaria could challenge.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
Only one team will go down this season and that will most likely be newcomers Ungheni as they started the season without a recognised keeper. Academia Chisinau, who are also expected to struggle, beat them 4-1 on the opening weekend of the new season.

ONE TO WATCH
Zimbru's **Dan Spataru** is being tracked by a host of foreign clubs.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Veteran striker **Igor Bugaiov** joined Zaria after playing in Romania, Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
The league race promises to be interesting, with title-holders **Mladost** starting as favourites, closely followed by **Rudar**, Buducnost, Sutjeska and Zeta.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
The league will be reduced from 12 to 10 clubs next term, so this season the bottom three will be relegated, while the clubs who will finish eighth and ninth will face play-off games against sides from the second tier.

ONE TO WATCH
Mladost signed 18-year-old midfielder **Marko Burzanovic** from financially struggling Buducnost.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Attacking midfielder Milos Krkotic returned after four seasons in Moldova with Dacia to join Zeta, while Admir Adrovic – who has had stints in Romania and Bahrain – signed for Mladost.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Crusaders are favourites to win the title for the third year in a row, but Linfield could challenge after signing international keeper **Roy Carroll**.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
Portadown, who must overcome a 12-point deduction, were not able to start the campaign due to "financial mismanagement". Also likely to be fighting against the drop are promoted side Ards and last term's strugglers Ballinamallard United and Carrick Rangers.

ONE TO WATCH
Now in his second full season with the Cliftonville, free-scoring 21-year-old midfielder Jay Donnelly has made a big impact on the local scene. He has electrifying pace and uses his height to good effect from crosses and corners.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Glentoran, who have fallen from grace in recent seasons and beset by financial problems, have signed former Rangers striker **Nacho Novo**.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
With a budget of around £24m, **Legia** are again title favorites. Lech Poznan, winners in 2015, have the next highest budget, roughly £9.5m.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
Promoted sides Arka Gdynia and Wisla Plock will be happy just to stay up, while **Korona Kielce** look to be very unstable and are looking for a new owner.

ONE TO WATCH
On loan at Wisla for the second half of last season, midfielder Rafal Wolski joined Lechia this summer from Fiorentina, having had previous spells with Bari and Mechelen.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Having sold Slovak international Ondrej Duda to Hertha Berlin for a reported £3.5m, Legia recruited French central midfielder Thibault Moulin from Belgian side Waasland-Beveren on a four-year contract.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS
Steaua, Astra and Pandurii all lost big players this summer but will still be in the mix, while Gheorghe Hagi's Academy have eyes on a first title bid.

RELEGATION BATTLERS
After two rounds of the new campaign, Rapid went bankrupt and were replaced by Poli Timisoara, who start with a 14-point deficit for failing to comply with last season's regulations. Targu Mures, Voluntari and Chiajna could also struggle.

ONE TO WATCH
This could be 20-year-old **Dorin Rotariu**'s last season at Dinamo as the midfielder has attracted interest from Celtic and Leicester City.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER
Now 36, **Lucian Sanmartean** signed a one-year contract with Pandurii after coming home from Al Ittihad in Saudi Arabia.

Serbia

SuperLiga

By Vladimir Novak

KEY DATES

The season started on July 23 and will finish on May 21, with a winter break from December 14 to February 12. Key matches include Partizan v Red Star on September 17, with the return on March 1.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Ivan Tomic resigned as Partizan boss after his side picked up one point from their first two league games and went out of Europe to Poland's Zaglebie Lubin. He was replaced by Marko Nikolic, who was sacked by Slovenian club Olimpija Ljubljana in April for racially abusing one of his own players.

Slovakia

Super Liga

By Peterjon Cresswell

KEY DATES

The season runs from July 16 until May 27, with a winter break between December 10 and February 18. Champions **Trencin** will face Slovan Bratislava for the first time this season on September 24.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Of the half-dozen managerial changes in the close season, the most significant are the return of Krisztian Nemeth to his old club Dunajska Streda, and the appointment of former Slovan Bratislava midfielder Norbert Hrncar at Ruzomberok. Mikulas Radvanyi filled Hrncar's previous post at Myjava.

Slovenia

PrvaLiga

By Peterjon Cresswell

KEY DATES

The league runs from July 16 until May 27, with a winter break between December 10 and February 25. The derby between Maribor and Olimpija Ljubljana was set for August 6, October 15, February 25 and April 29.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

After new Rudar coach Milovan Rajevac left after two weeks to take charge of Algeria's national team, he was replaced by **Slobodan Krcmarevic**, who has taken his first job in Slovenia.

Switzerland

Super League

By Brian Homewood

KEY DATES

Having kicked off on July 23, the season runs until June 1, with a winter break between December 10 and February 2. An early highlight is **Basle** hosting **Young Boys** on August 10.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

One of the few changes during the summer was Zdenek Zeman leaving his post at Lugano after they lost the Cup Final to be replaced on an interim basis by Andrea Manzo, who was previously the club's under-21 coach.

Wales

Premier League

By Mel Thomas

KEY DATES

The first phase runs from August 12 until January 15, after which the top six and bottom six split into championship and play-off groups.

MAJOR COACHING CHANGES

Matthew Bishop took over at Aberystwyth Town, with former Haverfordwest County boss Wayne Jones as his number two, with most of last season's squad having been moved on.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS

As ever there are only two serious candidates to win the title: **Red Star** and Partizan. Holders Red Star are favourites, but if they reach the Europa League group stage, their rivals, who are out of Europe, may benefit.

RELEGATION BATTLERS

For half of the league the main aim will be just to retain top-flight status. However, promoted Backa, who are debutants at this level, will be the main relegation candidates, along with Spartak, Borac and Radnik.

ONE TO WATCH

Montenegrin winger **Marko Jankovic**, who has joined his former club Partizan on loan from Olympiakos, has shown early signs that he could be a key player this term.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

Red Star's new signing Pablo Mouche, a 28-year-old winger on loan from Palmeiras, could prove to be one of the best foreigners to have played in the Serbian top flight.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS

Title-holders Trencin and 2014 champions Slovan Bratislava are expected to dominate again, while Slovakia's most-capped player, Miroslav Karhan, who started and finished his playing career at Spartak Trnava, will hope to revive his former club after his appointment as coach towards the end of last term.

RELEGATION BATTLERS

Recent strugglers Zemplin Michalovce and Zlate Moravce are likely to be scrapping near the bottom again, while newly promoted Tatran Presov, under former Celtic and Sunderland centre-back Stanislav Varga, will fancy their chances of holding their own in the top flight.

ONE TO WATCH

Cut from Slovakia's provisional Euro 2016 squad despite scoring in a pre-tournament friendly, Slovan Bratislava striker Adam Zrelak will have plenty to prove as the former champions look to grab back their crown from Trencin.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

Capped by Curacao, 6ft 5in Rotterdam-born **Rangelo Janga** will hope to match the exploits of compatriot Gino Van Kessel at Trencin following his arrival from Dordrecht.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS

Five-time champions until 2015, Maribor will be out to take the title back from Olimpija. Domzale and Gorica look the best equipped to run the big two closest.

RELEGATION BATTLERS

Aluminij Kidricevo, who lost to Zavrc in the PrvaLiga play-off but still went up due to their opponents' financial demise, face a tough season. Fellow promoted side Radomlje could also struggle, along with Koper and Rudar Velenje.

ONE TO WATCH

Now 31, **Andraz Kirm** has returned home after stints at Wisla Krakow, Groningen and Omonia Nicosia. A title-winner with Domzale a decade ago, he has signed for Olimpija.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

Now establishing his place in the national side, midfielder Blaz Vrhovec joined Maribor after four successful years at Celje and big things are expected of the 24-year-old.

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS

Champions for the last seven seasons, Basle will take some stopping after splashing out over €15m in the transfer market. Last term they finished 14 points clear of Young Boys and it looks as though nothing will stop them again this time.

RELEGATION BATTLERS

Lausanne-Sport will hope to have enough to stay up after promotion, while Lugano and Vaduz – who finished above the relegation place by just one and two points respectively – will be hoping to avoid a similar nail-biting finale.

ONE TO WATCH

Seydou Doumbia was prolific in two seasons with Young Boys before moving on to CSKA Moscow. However, the Ivorian's career has gone downhill dramatically in the last 18 months with unhappy spells in Italy and at Newcastle United. Now at Basle on loan from Roma.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

A big future was expected for Colombian defender **Eder Balanta** until a crisis of confidence and injuries last season. Now at Basle, can he put himself back in the shop window?

CHAMPIONSHIP CHALLENGERS

Reigning champions **The New Saints** are firm favourites as they aim for a sixth consecutive title. Bala Town and Connah's Quay Nomads will hope to push them all the way.

RELEGATION BATTLERS

Cefn Druids and Cardiff Metropolitan University were promoted at the end of last term but might struggle this season, along with Rhyl and Carmarthen Town.

ONE TO WATCH

Zyaac Edwards, who moved from Caernarfon Town to Rhyl, could make his mark this season. The brother of ex-TNS defender Kai, he has previous experience with Airbus UK and Prestatyn Town.

SIGNING OF THE SUMMER

The sale of Chris Venables, the league's top scorer for the past three seasons, by Aberystwyth to Bala may well prove decisive in the title race. He will team up with another top-class hit man in Lee Hunt.

World Soccer vintage 37 years ago

September 1979

French underdogs and South American champions

Unlikely French champions Strasbourg, whose team included future national coach of *Les Bleus*, Raymond Domenech, and future Boca Juniors boss Carlos Bianchi, featured on the cover 37 years ago, while inside there was a report on Olimpia's achievement in becoming the first Paraguayan club to win the Libertadores Cup.

Olimpia beat Argentina's Boca 2-0 over two legs in the Final and the driving force behind their success was coach Luis Cubilla, the former Uruguayan international winger who had been appointed at the start of the previous season because, as Eric Weil wrote in his report, "he had cup experience".

Weil set the scene for Olimpia's success when he noted: "Cubilla took Olimpia's squad to a pre-season training camp and this was the first time such a thing had ever been done in Paraguay.

"Another first in Paraguay was that he made them train twice a day – many of the players, earning comparatively little from soccer, are part-timers and team captain [Hugo] Talavera is an architect."

Weil added: "Olimpia probably won the Cup after only three minutes of the first leg in Asuncion when a defensive mistake allowed [Osvaldo] Aquino to open the scoring.

"This abruptly changed Boca Juniors' plans of playing for an away draw and forced them to do what they do worst – attack. But while Olimpia's defence was their weakest department, Boca's disorganised attack got nowhere against a side with a style very similar to their own."

Olimpia led 2-0 at half-time in the first leg and hung on to their lead in the second half. Weil suggested that "scoring two goals in the second leg always seemed too tall an order for Boca's poor attacking ideas".

And so it proved – although the second leg wasn't without incident as Uruguayan ref Juan Daniel Cardellino sent off two players from each team.

"Olimpia defended their lead by packing their goal area, with only long kicks up to [Evaristo] Isasi and [Enrique] Villalba to relieve them," continued Weil.

"Boca had their chances but it was again a case of their attack failings being all too evident".

Although Olimpia were champions for the first time in their history, their success was not celebrated by everyone, with Weil summing up: "To cap it all, Boca coach Juan Carlos Lorenzo accused Olimpia of refusing to play open soccer – the very tactics which had been so successful for him and Boca in the cup which they had won for the last two years." WS

Libertadores... Olimpia's triumph

SIX WORLD SOCCER, September, 1979

Libertadores Cup Final report from ERIC WEIL

Olimpia win for Paraguay

THIS year a new name — and country — went on the Libertadores Cup (South American Club Championship) which in its 19 previous editions had only been won by eight clubs from three countries — Olimpia, of Paraguay, who beat holders Boca Juniors of Argentina in the finals, winning 2-0 in Asunción and drawing the second leg 0-0 in Buenos Aires.

This ended the domination of the trophy by Argentina (12 wins), Uruguay (4) and Brazil (3). In fact, it had come to be known as the Argentine Cup in some quarters.

Although Olimpia had participated in the tournament 13 times, they had reached the final only once before — in the very first competition in 1960 when losing to Peñarol of Uruguay. Olimpia made no changes from last year's team which won the Paraguayan first division, but they engaged former Uruguayan international winger Luis Cubillas as coach "because he had cup experience."

Cubillas had played for Argentina's River Plate in the 1966 final and, with only three years coaching experience, he started a revolution in Paraguayan soccer.

Cubillas took Olimpia's squad to a pre-season training camp and this was the first time such a thing had ever been done in Paraguay and while he made no team changes, he taught some of the club's stars to believe in themselves — such as defender Flaminio Sosa, Luis Torres (a great ball player), Hugo Talavera (chief organiser and one of the country's top players) and forwards Evaristo Isasi (as dangerous as he was apathetic), Alberto Kiese (clever and with a hard shot) and goal-scoring Atanasio Villalba who all had the talent to walk into the world's best teams, but seldom showed it.

Another first in Paraguay was that he made them train twice a day — many of the players, earning comparatively little from soccer, are part-timers and team captain Talavera is an architect.

The results were soon evident in pre-season games. Olimpia won one summer tournament in Montevideo beating Uruguay's top clubs Peñarol and Nacional. Of the 12 matches played in the Libertadores Cup, they won nine, drew two and only lost 2-1 to Bolivar in La Paz where they faced the Bolivian champions weakened by the absence of four stars injured a few days earlier against Bolivia's other representatives, Jorge Wilsterman, where spectators entered the field and attacked the players.

This result put their semi-final chances in doubt for a time and it was rumoured that they offered players of Paraguay's vice-champions, Sol de America (who had already lost their chance), a bonus of $50,000 if they avoided defeat against Bolivar in the next group match. Sol de America drew 2-2 in La Paz and Olimpia won the group by a point.

The semi-final group fixture list probably favoured them, because after beating fancied Guarani (Brazil) at home, they picked up enough points to qualify for the final in their next two matches before Guarani were scheduled to play their rivals at home (but all this has been published in previous *World Soccer* issues).

Officials of Olimpia — Paraguay's oldest soccer club which reached its 77th anniversary shortly before the finals — said that a million dollars had been spent in the process of winning the trophy for the first time.

The captains of the two Libertadores Cup Finalists, Sune of Boca Juniors and Talavera of Olimpia, greet each other before battle commences.

Olimpia probably won the cup after only three minutes of the first leg in Asunción when a defensive mistake allowed Aquino to open the score.

This abruptly changed Boca Juniors' plans of playing for an away draw and forced them to do what they do worst — attack. But while Olimpia's defence was their weakest department, Boca's disorganised attack got nowhere against a side with a style very similar to their own — "pressing".

This method of applying constant pressure when a team has lost possession and making it difficult for them to build up attacks, resulted in both teams outpressing each other and it was yet another poor match in this competition with both teams lacking ideas.

There was little soccer and too much running and kicking — of players as well as the ball. Olimpia hardly deserved their 2-0 half-time lead, although Boca's defence was also uncharacteristically vulnerable without suspended Sa and the bad state of the field did not help.

In fact Olimpia's second goal, from a free-kick by Piazza, had Gatti beaten by the bounce of the ball. In the second half Boca, who brought on an extra forward (Palacios) for midfielder Benitez, had more of the ball, but, as usual, did little right with it. In any case, scoring two goals always seemed too tall an order for Boca's poor attacking ideas.

The second leg in Buenos Aires was no better, but the tone for it was again set within three minutes. Following the fouls of the first leg and promises for revenge — plus threats from Boca coach Juan Carlos Lorenzo against Paraguayan fans with whom he had a slanging match in Asunción — there could have been a blood bath.

Uruguayan referee Cardellino — blamed later by Lorenzo for "selling" the match — cooled it before three minutes were up when sending off Sune (B) and Paredes (O) for a comparatively mild offence — crashing into and insulting each other.

Before it was over another player from each side — Banabria (B) and Kiese (O) — received marching orders, the Paraguayan perhaps a bit unjustly, but it helped to keep it comparatively clean.

Olimpia defended their first-leg lead by packing their goal area — as expected — with only long kicks up to Isasi and Villalba to relieve them. Boca Juniors were given plenty of time and space to build up attacks, but getting near goal was another problem — without solution, as expected.

True, Boca had their chances and Olimpia goalie Almeida made some outstanding saves

Olimpia's defence was their weakest department, but Boca's disorganised attack got nowhere against a side with a style similar to their own

WORLD SOCCER, September, 1979 SEVEN

Olimpia from Paraguay, Libertadores Cup winners 1979 by a two-nil aggregate over Boca Juniors from Argentina. The new South American Champions are (back row from left to right): Solalinde, Paredes, Kiese, Gimenez, Almeida, Piazza. Front row: Isasi, Torres, Villalba, Talavera, Aquino.

as the home team attacked almost throughout the match, but it was again a case of Boca's attack failings being all too evident.

Olimpia's cup win was deserved as they were the better of two teams showing little soccer. In fact, the type of spoiling and speculating game which had won Boca the cup two years in succession had found a worthy successor in Olimpia . . . and it seems to be the only way to win this trophy.

To cap it all, Boca coach Lorenzo accused Olimpia of speculating and refusing to play open soccer — the very tactics which had been so successful for him and Boca in the cup which they had won for the last two years.

But for the Argentine team, which for so long had managed to get by without a good attack, a cycle seemed to have ended and talks immediately started about reducing the current playing staff of 45 to about half that number.

The writing was on the wall at the start of the season when Lorenzo did not really want to stay on realising that the club's financial situation would not allow him to buy the players he needed to strengthen the attack. Players were bought, but they hardly fitted into Boca's style and did not effectively strengthen the front line.

Boca Juniors, who as cup holders had a bye into the semi-final stage, won semi-final group 2 — in which only five goals were scored in six poor matches — by beating injury-stricken Independiente 1-0 in a play-off. The latter missed no less than seven first teamers — defenders Villaverde and Perez (injured), Pagnanini and Insaurralde (suspended), midfielders Fren and Galvan and forward Outes (all injured).

While Boca Juniors frequently fielded reserves in league matches to concentrate on the Cup, Independiente tried to win both, qualified for the league semi-finals, but were unlucky to be hit by injuries (and suspensions) at the vital moment. Yet Boca only won with a goal scored by Mastrangelo in time added on for stoppages during the 30 minutes extra-time played.

Earlier, in the last group matches (since *World Soccer*'s last issue), Boca had beaten Independiente 2-0 with first half goals from Perotti and the prodigious Mastrangelo while their Argentine rivals played incredibly below form. In the second half, Independiente's fight-back was stopped by first one defender (Pagnanini) and then another (Insaurralde) being sent off.

Thus Boca needed a win in their last match with Peñarol in Montevideo to go into the final on points. They started in promising fashion and came close early on against the Uruguayan champions who had no longer any final chance, but later it developed into another poor encounter in this group, ending with no score to set up the play-off.

Final — First leg
July 22 (in Asuncion)
OLIMPIA (Paraguay) (2) 2 (Aquino, Piazza)
BOCA JUNIORS (Argentina) 0
Olimpia: Almeida, Solalinde, Paredes, Gimenez, Piazza, Torres, Kiese, Talavera, Isasi, Villalba, Aquino.
Boca Juniors: Gatti, Perna, Capurro, Moura, Bordon, Benitez (Palacios), Suñe, Salinas, Mastrangelo, Salguero, Rocha.
Referee: Gastón Castro, Chile

Second leg
July 27 (in Buenos Aires)
BOCA JUNIORS (Argentina) 0
OLIMPIA (Paraguay) 0
Boca Juniors: Gatti, Perna, Sa, Capurro, Bordon, Benitez, Suñe (sent off 2m), Zanabria (sent off 69m) (Salguero), Mastrangelo, Salinas, Rocha (Palacios).
Olimpia: Almeida, Solalinde, Paredes (sent off 2m), Gimenez, Piazza, Torres (Guasch), Kiese (sent off 69m), Talavera, Isasi, Villalba, Aquino (Delgado).
Referee: Jose Gardellino, Uruguay — Att. 50,000

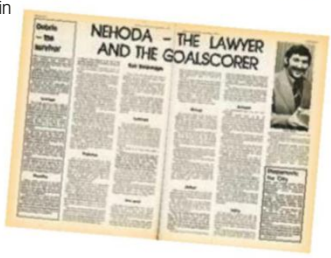
Beaten finalists in the Libertadores Cup, Boca Juniors from Argentina. Back row from left to right: Zanabria, Capurro, Sune, Sa, Pernia, Gatti, Bordon. Front row: Mastrangelo, Benitez, Salinas, Rocha.

Also in this issue...

p16-17 Keir Radnedge reported that there would be "sympathy everywhere in the football world" following the death of one of Hungary's greatest players, Sandor Kocsis. He died when he fell, or jumped, from a Barcelona clinic window, aged 49.

CUBILIA PULLS OFF COUP WITH OLIMPIA OF ASUNCION

p18-19 Radnedge also reported on the story of Czechoslovakia captain Zdenek Nehoda who was planning his life after football, as a lawyer. Having finished the previous season as the leading goalscorer in the league for his side Dukla Prague, Nehoda was just two years away from obtaining his legal qualification for when his playing days ended.



NEHODA – THE LAWYER AND THE GOALSCORER

p33 Brian Glanville commented on the turnaround by Brazil coach Claudio Coutinho, who had played a defensive system at the 1978 World Cup but was now, a year later, introducing a more attacking style of play to accommodate the likes of Falcao, Socrates – "the best centre-forward since Tostao" – and Zico. "How ironic," he commented, "that it is only now, one year after the last World Cup and three long years before the next one, that Coutinho should see the light and restore to Brazilian football some of its splendour and adventure."

BRIAN GLANVILLE

p36-37 Jack Rollin rounded up the pre-season transfer news from England, such as Laurie Cunningham's move from West Brom to Real Madrid. Other transfers included promoted Crystal Palace spending £1 million on Mike Flanagan from Charlton Athletic and QPR's Gerry Francis.

Jack Rollin previews the new English season

TRANSFER MARKET BUSIER THAN EVER

10 years ago

David Healy scores a hat-trick as Northern Ireland beat a star-studded Spain team 3-2 at Windsor Park, Belfast in a Euro 2008 qualifier. Northern Ireland twice came from behind against a team that included Casillas, Puyol, Xavi, Torres, Villa and Raul.

20 years ago

Arsene Wenger is named Arsenal's new manager. Arsenal director David Dein orchestrated the appointment, eventually managing to persuade Japanese club Nagoya Grampus Eight to release the Frenchman from his contract with them.

30 years ago

Portuguese clubs Porto and Sporting were the biggest scorers as the European and UEFA Cup first-round, first-leg matches kicked off, with both winning 9-0. Porto beat Rabat Ajax of Malta in the European Cup, while Sporting won away to IA of Iceland in the UEFA Cup.

40 years ago

Former Manchester United idol George Best scores after 71 seconds of his debut for Fulham, in an away game against Bristol Rovers. He and Rodney Marsh had joined the London club in late August, linking up with former England captain Bobby Moore who was already there.

50 years ago

Lluis Pujol scores a hat-trick for Barcelona as they beat fellow Spaniards Real Zaragoza 4-3 on aggregate in the Final of the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup, the precursor to the UEFA Cup. Barca lost the first leg 1-0 at home but won 4-2 in Zaragoza after extra-time.

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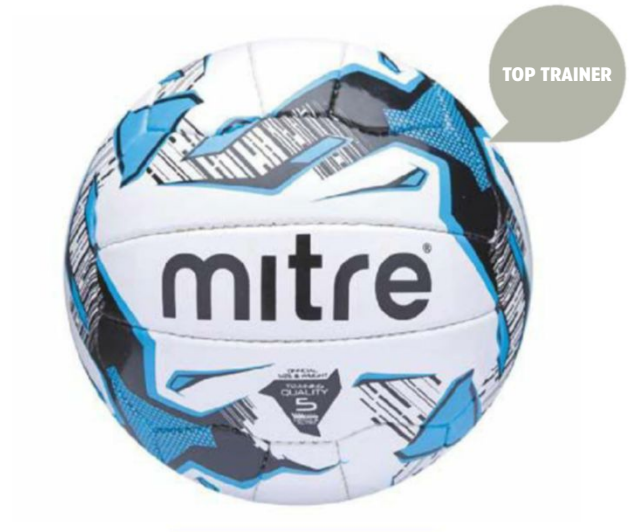

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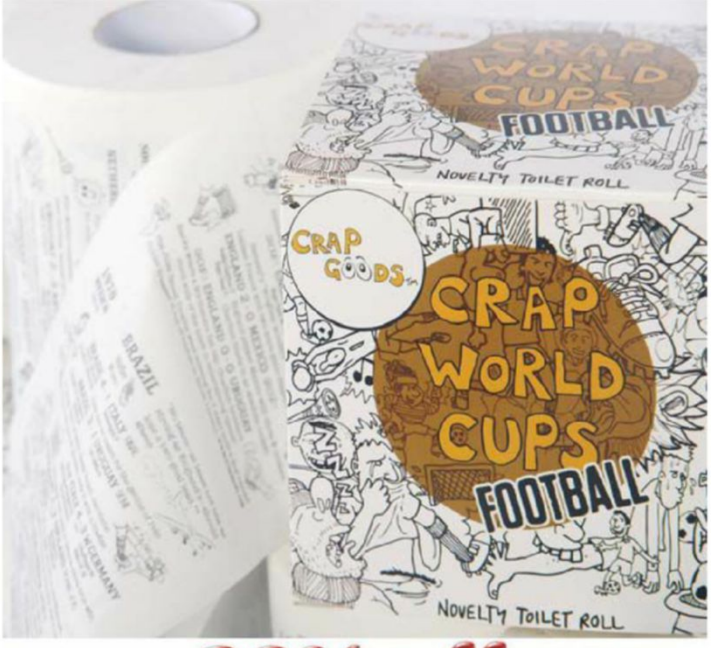
MISCELLANEOUS

England's story. On a bog roll.



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Fighting back...New York City find their form in MLS

JULY 8-AUGUST 3, 2016

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Friday July 8

CZECH REPUBLIC: Arsenal keeper Petr Cech retires from international football, aged 34, after winning a record 124 caps for Czech Republic.
ENGLAND: The doping case against Liverpool and France defender Mamadou Sakho, who served a 30-day provisional suspension and missed last season's Europa League Final, is dropped by UEFA.
ITALY: Two days after Lazio announce Marcelo Bielsa is to be their new coach, the Argentinian pulls out of the deal.
SPAIN: Fran Carles, captain of third-tier side Linares Deportivo, dies after an accident in a hotel gym. The 26-year-old sustained a thigh injury, causing a haemorrhage that spread to his kidneys and other organs.

Saturday July 9

SOUTH SUDAN: Leko Nelson and William Batista, team manager and secretary-general of champions Atlabara respectively, are killed in crossfire between warring political factions in the capital Juba.

Sunday July 10

GERMANY: Werder Bremen's Uganda winger Melvyn Lorenzen will miss three weeks pre-season training after being attacked at his home.
MEXICO: Guadalajara claim a place in next year's Liberatdores Cup with a 2-1 win over Veracruz in the Super Cup game between the winners of the apertura and clausura cups. Apertura league winners Tigres beat clausura winners Pachuca 1-0 in the Champion of Champions match.
PORTUGAL: A 1-0 win over hosts France in the Euro Final, thanks to a goal from Eder in extra-time, gives Portugal their first major silverware.

Monday July 11

BRAZIL: Douglas Costa, who was selected as an overage player, withdraws from Brazil's Olympic squad with a thigh injury.
GERMANY: A competition-record crowd of 54,689 watches Italy beat hosts Germany 1-0, in Stuttgart, in the opening game of the European Under-19 finals.

Tuesday July 12

INDIA: Ryan Giggs says he will join former Manchester United team-mate Paul Scholes in the inaugural Premier Futsal League, along with such stars as Ronaldinho and Deco.
SCOTLAND: Brendan Rodgers' first game in charge of Celtic ends in a 1-0 defeat away to Lincoln Red Imps of Gibraltar in a Champions League qualifier.

Wednesday July 13

COLOMBIA: Miguel Borja scores twice as Atletico Nacional win 2-1 to complete a 4-1 aggregate victory in the Libertadores Cup semi-final against Sao Paulo of Brazil, who finish the game with nine men after captain Diego Lugano and Wesley are sent off.
SLOVENIA: Trailing 4-0 inside 32 minutes at home to Trencin, Olimpija Ljubljana score three times to keep their Champions League hopes alive ahead of next week's second leg in Slovakia by finishing the game only 4-3 down.
USA: Seattle Sounders record their biggest-ever MLS victory with a 5-0 win at home to Dallas.

Semi success...Miguel Borja celebrates scoring as Atletico Nacional beat Sao Paulo to reach the Final of the Libertadores Cup

Thursday July 14

CYPRUS: AEK Larnaca come from two goals down to win 3-2 away to Cliftonville in the Europa League.
ECUADOR: Independiente del Valle become the first Ecuadorian side ever to reach the Libertadores Cup Final, beating Boca Juniors 3-2 in Argentina to win 5-3 on aggregate.
GREECE: Panathinaikos and Panionios will play their opening home games of the new season behind closed doors following crowd disturbances at the end of last term.
SCOTLAND: Neil Lennon is sent off in his first competitive game as Hibernian manager as they lose 1-0 in the Europa League to a goal after 17 seconds from Kamil Wilczek of Denmark's Brondby.

Friday July 15

BELGIUM: National coach Marc Wilmots leaves his post, two weeks after Belgium lost 3-1 to Wales in the Euro 2016 quarter-finals.
CZECH REPUBLIC: Karel Jarolim is appointed national coach on a two-year deal.
GERMANY: Midfield twins Sven

Clash...Independiente del Valle's Arturo Mina (left) challenges Daniel Diaz of Boca Juniors

and Lars Bender are named as overage players in Germany's squad for the Olympic Games in Rio.

SCOTLAND: Dundee United make history, beating Arbroath on penalties to win the first group game of the new Scottish League Cup in its new format.

UKRAINE: Andriy Shevchenko, who was Mykhaylo Fomenko's assistant at the Euro finals, replaces his former boss as national coach.

Saturday July 16

MALAWI: Big Bullets beat Moyale Barracks on penalties to win the Presidential Cup.

TURKEY: Fenerbahce's friendly with Lyon in Istanbul is cancelled after Friday's attempted coup in Turkey which led to more than 160 people being killed. A charity match in Antalya for the Samuel Eto'o foundation is also postponed.

UKRAINE: League champions Dynamo Kiev beat cup holders Shakhtar Donetsk on penalties ➤

Sent off...Hibs boss Neil Lennon (left)

Asia

JOHN DUERDEN

Test...Laos keeper Sengphachan Bounthisanh keeps out India in a 2019 AFC Asian Cup qualifier

Expansion in Asia

Asian Cup finals set to copy Europe and feature 24 teams

It is fair to say that opinion remains divided as to whether this summer's expanded European Championship was a success. And that debate will be rekindled in January 2019 when the Asian Cup moves to United Arab Emirates and features 24 teams for the first time – eight more than usual.

The same concerns will be aired. Some will be worried about the presence of too many weak teams playing cautiously, and the possibility of a nation that finishes third in their group going on to win the title. Others will argue that allowing more nations to the party simply makes it bigger, better and more fun.

The 2015 Asian Cup in Australia was not only the last 16-team tournament, it was also the end of an era, with only 20 of the AFC's 46 full members entered in qualification, with the top three from the previous tournament also going through. Those countries that were not allowed to enter went into the AFC Challenge Cup – a low-key event for '"developing nations". But while this second-tier tournament offered some useful competitive matches, as far as the Asian Cup was concerned, it left much of Asia on the outside.

As well as half the continent not even being involved in qualification when the tournament started, it was geographically imbalanced. While Southeast Asia is the most passionate football area in the region, countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam were absent. South Asia – with India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and others – was also not represented.

In most of these absent nations, there was more interest in the Euros than their own confederation's competition – meaning two billion potential fans were not paying attention to the Asian Cup.

Missing out on markets that are home to over a quarter of the planet's population has been a source of conversation at AFC HQ in Kuala Lumpur for years. So, for commercial and prestige reasons, it was felt best to allow eight more teams into the Asian Cup and to open up qualification to all.

Compared to the European Championship, there is less of a concern about the dilution of quality. There has long been quite a drop between the top four in Asia, followed by a few dark horses and then the rest. If truth be told, few fans over the years have raved about the quality of the football on show at the Asian Cup.

Any drop of standards should be more than offset by the benefits of having teams from Southeast Asia and India competing.

More nations means more interest, and more interaction can only help the tournament to grow and become more meaningful. There is also the hope that having the smaller teams mixing with the bigger nations in a major tournament will, in the long-run, help all to grow stronger.

There are, of course, still issues. While Asian Cup qualification has been increased, it has also been merged with World Cup qualification. This means the six weakest teams, who are eliminated in the preliminary round knockout stage, play just two competitive games in four years. The AFC has talked about starting a new tournament for these teams but nothing has materialised as yet.

Overall, the expansion of the Asian Cup has the potential to help lift the tournament to another level off the pitch. It could make it truly continental, make it bigger, more important, more colourful and more newsworthy, in Asia and around the world.

On the pitch improvements can wait. The Euros offered an interesting experiment but the situations are not the same. WS

➤ in the Ukrainian Super Cup.

Sunday July 17

BENIN: FIFA threatens Benin with suspension after a judge in the West African nation issues arrest warrants for FIFA council member Constant Omari and Ivory Coast federation president Augustin Diallo following the country's football federation leadership election last month.
CHINA: Shanghai Shenhua striker Demba Ba suffers a potentially career-ending leg injury in his side's 2-1 derby win over Shanghai SIPG.
ECUADOR: The top-flight game between River Plate and Aucas is abandoned when a swarm of bees descends on the stadium in the city of Guayaquil.
MYANMAR: A goal from Win Naing Soe wraps up the National League for Yadanarbon with four games to go as they beat Zwekapin United 1-0.
USA: Despite having Anibal Godoy and Alberto Quintero dismissed, nine-man San Jose Earthquakes still manage to beat Toronto 2-1.

Monday July 18

ITALY: Giampiero Ventura officially takes charge of Italy's national side and, at 68, becomes the second-oldest coach to lead the *Azzurri*.
RUSSIA: A report by the World Anti-Doping Agency says that "at least one" foreign player in the Russian Premier League had a positive drugs test hidden as part of a system of state-dictated doping cover-ups overseen by the Russian ministry of sport.

Tuesday July 19

ITALY: Lazio sell just 11 season tickets as fans of the Serie A side boycott the sale's first day.
NIGERIA: The day after announcing that French coach Paul Le Guen will become the country's new technical adviser, the Nigerian Football Federation is forced to backtrack and admit that a deal had not been agreed.

Wednesday July 20

COLOMBIA: Atletico Nacional are denied an away win in the first leg of the Libertadores Cup Final as Arturo Mina's late goal for Independiente del Valle cancels out Orlando Berrio's opener in Ecuador.
ENGLAND: New laws are outlined to target "intolerable behaviour" in the English game that will see players receive a red card for offensive or abusive language or gestures towards referees.
HUNGARY: Zoltan Gera scores with a penalty in normal time but has ➤

Unfair...Red Bulls' Jesse Marsch believes players like NYC's David Villa (in blue) get preferential treatment from officials

USA

PAUL GARDNER

MLS rivalry hopes grow

NYC bounce back from Red Bulls trouncing in New York derby

The 2016 season was always going to be an awkward one for MLS. And so, with the hosting of the Copa America in the US set to severely disrupt the domestic game, commissioner Don Garber agreed that there would be no games for the first 15 days of the tournament.

It may not have been what Garber wanted, but it was a good tactical move on the global stage. Not so good, however, was what happened in New York on May 21.

Even though New York Red Bulls are actually from New Jersey, the MLS marketing machine has wasted no time in trying to hype-up the two-year-old fixture against New York City FC as the competition's great rivalry.

While attracting 37,858 to the Yankee Stadium would appear a success, the Bulls' 7-0 obliteration of NYC was a disaster on the pitch – although, oddly, NYC coach Patrick Vieira, who had replaced Jason Kreis after just one year in charge, escaped any blame.

But after such a humiliating defeat, some sort of footballing miracle hit the Big Apple.

Overnight, NYC started to win games – and play good football. When Red Bulls returned to Yankee Stadium in July, they were outplayed, 2-0, and a real local rivalry had become reality. The fires were stoked further when Bulls' coach Jesse Marsch complained: "If Villa, Pirlo or Lampard get touched, they go down. They draw fouls, they draw yellow cards and it's an epidemic. It's an epidemic across the league with these referees who just want to give the benefit of the doubt to star players."

NYC, now able to field a finally-fit Frank Lampard, have also found a star in Jack Harrison, a 19-year-old English attacking midfielder who was part of Manchester United's youth programme before moving to the US in 2010. At ease among much older players at NYC, Harrison has been scoring regularly and providing assists with remarkable maturity.

When MLS took its mid-season break – marked by the visit of Arsenal to play the MLS All-Stars – NYC were the top team of the Eastern Conference, but a 4-1 defeat when they met Red Bulls for the third time showed possible signs of implosion, with defender Ethan White and coach Vieira both sent off.

Another caution... Nigel De Jong

Derby delight... Frank Lampard (left) celebrates with scorer Jack Harrison (no11)

Over in the Western Conference, Seattle Sounders – the league's best-supported side with an average home attendance of 40,738 – are one place off the bottom, in 10th place, despite having their own highly promising youngster. Jordan Morris is a 21-year-old American striker who is regularly on target despite his side's struggles.

Los Angeles Galaxy, the West Coast's other big-hitters, have two former Premier League stars in Ashley Cole and Steven Gerrard, while coach Bruce Arena also enlisted Dutch hard man Nigel De Jong. A highly controversial signing, De Jong has added little but violence to the set-up and by mid-season he had already served two suspensions for dangerous tackles. Galaxy are winning games, but can hardly be described as an attractive team.

Not so Dallas, whose football is always entertaining and which no doubt can be attributed to all of their midfielders and forwards being Latin Americans. Good to watch, Dallas are successful too and are leading the Western Conference.

They have, however, lost 24-year-old Colombian forward Fabian Castillo, who has joined Trabzonspor in Turkey. And he could be followed to Europe by 25-year-old Argentinian midfielder Mauro Diaz.

Houston Dynamo, the other Texas team in MLS, languish at the bottom of the West and their problems stem largely from the ill-considered hiring of Scottish boss Owen Coyle in 2014. Seemingly uncomfortable in the American set-up, Coyle never looked like a good choice and he quit - by "mutual agreement" - early in the season, although the team he assembled continues to perform poorly.

Another British coach lost his job when Adrian Heath was fired by Orlando City. The team's results were not that bad, but the owners evidently wanted them to be a lot better. Hired to replace Heath is Kreis, fresh from being shown the door at NYC FC.

The current season has brought no big-name signings, although Colorado Rapids have brought in Albanian striker Shkelzen Gashi and current champions Portland Timbers have the Lithuanian defender Vytautas Andriuskevicius – certainly a long name, if not a big one.

Garber has been relatively quiet of late – meaning less talk of MLS becoming one of the world's great leagues – but he has agreed that the competition will be one of the leagues to take part in experiments to test the use of instant video replays as an aid to referees.

Putting itself in the vanguard of new thinking about the sport is a sensible, progressive move for MLS – and it projects a much more dynamic image of the league than Los Angeles Galaxy's pursuit of ageing, used-to-be stars from Europe. WS

his spot-kick saved in the shoot-out as Ferencvaros lose to Partizani Tirana in the Champions League.
PORTUGAL: Euro 2016-winning coach Fernando Santos signs a new four-year contract with Portugal.
TURKEY: German striker Mario Gomez, who won the league on loan at Besiktas from Fiorentina last season, says he will not be taking up an option to return due to the "political situation" in Turkey.

Thursday July 21

HOLLAND: Michel Vlap makes history as the first player to appear as a fourth substitute as part of a trial at the Euro Under-19 finals. The 19-year-old came on at half-time in extra-time in the fifth-place play-off against Germany.
SCOTLAND: Hearts miss a penalty and hit the woodwork twice as they lose 2-1 at home to Maltese side Birkirkara to exit the Europa League. Local rivals Hibernian almost pull off a shock of their own as they win 1-0 at Brondby in Denmark before losing on penalties.
SPAIN: Former Porto boss Julen Lopetegui is appointed Spain's new national coach, replacing Vicente Del Bosque, who stood down after the Euro finals.

New national coach...Julen Lopetegui

Friday July 22

ENGLAND: Sunderland's Sam Allardyce signs a two-year deal to manage England. Steve Bruce, who was also interviewed for the job, leaves Hull City.

Saturday July 23

AUSTRALIA: Victory over Vietnam in a penalty shoot-out after a 3-3 draw sees Australia win the Southeast Asian AFF Under-16 Championship.
BELGIUM: Club Brugge come from

Cambodia

CHRISTIAN RADNEDGE

Banned from the AFC Cup

Champions vow to fight match-fixing punishment

This year was supposed to be the start of a new dawn for Phnom Penh Crown, who had won a record sixth Cambodian league title and therefore qualified for the 2017 AFC Cup. And 2016 was also supposed to signal an end to the darkest period of the club's history.

In November 2015, the club had taken the extraordinary measure of suspending seven of its players, and four officials, for allegedly taking part in match-fixing. Yok As Ari, Thong Da, Sary Matnorotin, Toch Sok Heng, Ngoy Srin, Sos Suhana and San Usaphea were all disciplined, as were club officers Ngoun Chansothea, Ser Syna, Tes Sophat and youth coach Bouy Dary.

The allegations sprung from voice recordings obtained by the club that apparently revealed an internal plot by Dary and others to influence first-team players to throw games in an effort to have Swiss coach Sam Schweingruber ousted.

Those responsible were banned by the club days before their championship play-off game, with club president Rithy Samnang explaining: "These suspensions are for gross misconduct and a serious breach of their employment contracts by way of match manipulation and the deliberate harming of Phnom Penh Crown FC's reputation."

The Football Federation of Cambodia later found the officials guilty and banned them from the sport temporarily but cleared the players. However, the fallout has continued to blight Phnom Penh Crown and the Asian Football Confederation have barred the club from competing in next year's AFC Cup qualifiers due to last year's scandal.

An AFC spokesperson explained the federation's decision, stating: "We can confirm that the AFC has refused the participation of Phnom Penh Crown FC in the AFC Cup 2017 play-off qualifiers. This is due to four officials affiliated with the club having been found guilty (by the disciplinary committee of the Football Federation of Cambodia in a decision on 29 January 2016) of offences relating to match-fixing.

"The AFC Statutes are very clear on the issue, and

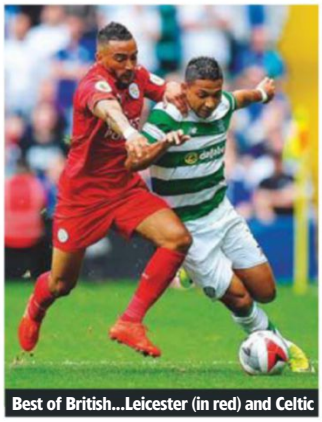
Making a splash ...champions Phnom Penh Crown celebrate

Home...Phnom Penh Crown's RSN Stadium

a goal down to beat Standard Liege 2-1 in the Belgian Super Cup.
ENGLAND: David Moyes is named Sam Allardyce's replacement as manager of Sunderland.
RUSSIA: Mircea Lucescu wins his first silverware since taking over as coach of Zenit as they beat CSKA 1-0 to retain the Russian Super Cup.

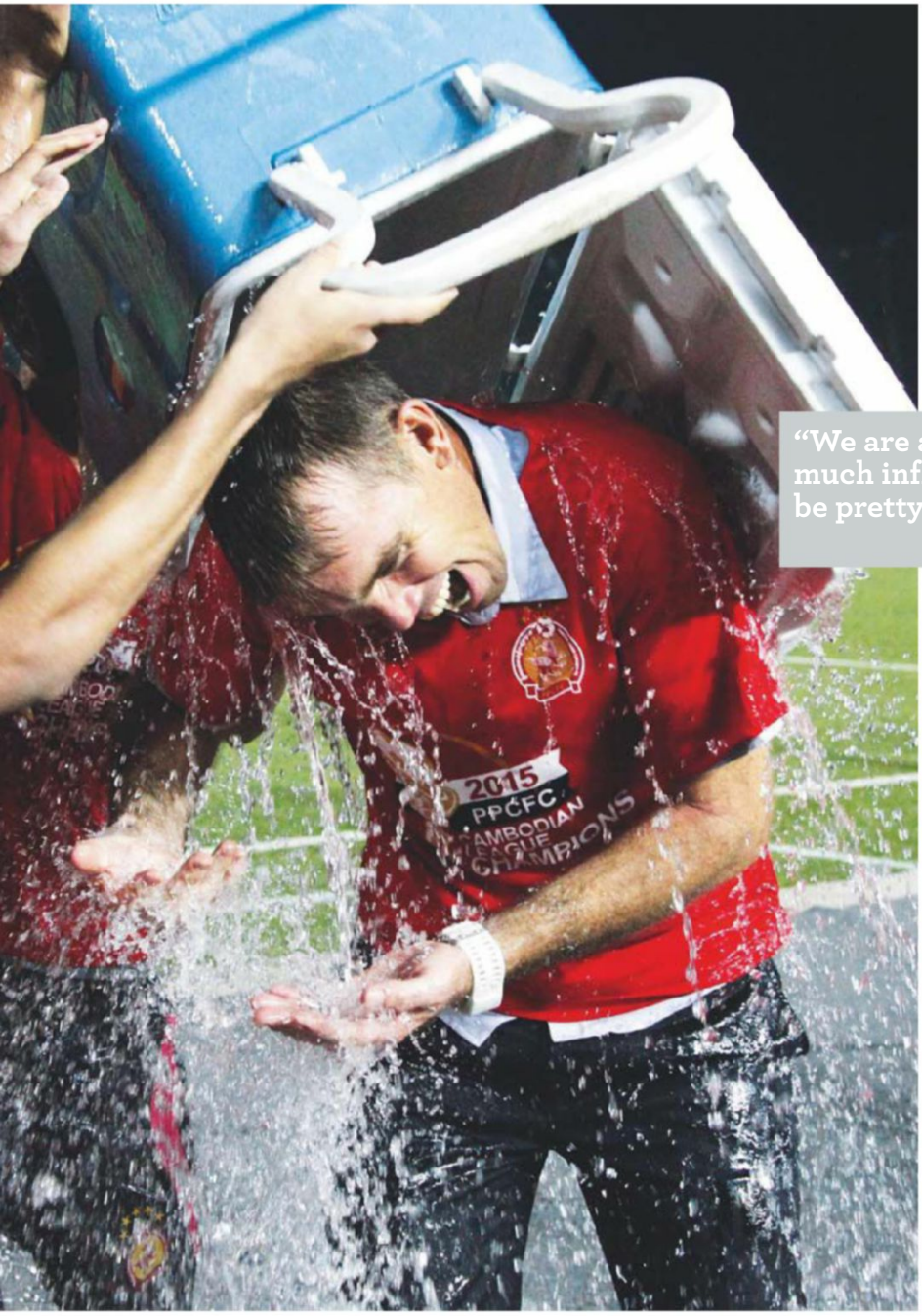
Sunday July 24

CHINA: A friendly between Manchester United and Manchester City at the Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing is called off after heavy rain leaves the pitch unplayable.
DJIBOUTI: Djibouti Telecom win the domestic double with a victory over Dikhil on penalties in the Cup Final.
ECUADOR: Barcelona beat El Nacional 3-0 to win the Primera A first stage and qualify for next year's Libertadores Cup.
ENGLAND: Premier League champions Leicester City beat their Scottish counterparts Celtic on penalties in Glasgow after a 1-1 draw in the International Champions Cup.
FRANCE: Goals from Jean-Kevin Augustin, Ludovic Blas, Lucas Tousart and Issa Diop give France a 4-0 victory over Italy in the Final of the European Under-19 Championship.


Best of British...Leicester (in red) and Celtic

Monday July 25

BRAZIL: Ex-Portugal boss Paulo Bento, who was only appointed coach in May, leaves Cruzeiro after just four wins in 15 league games.
FIFA: The three candidates vying to succeed Michel Platini as president of European football's governing body are confirmed as Slovenia's Aleksander Ceferin, Duch FA boss Michael Van Praag and Angel Maria Villar, the Spaniard who has been doing the job on an interim basis since May. Wolfgang Niersbach, ➤



article 73.6 states that a club that is found guilty of match-fixing will be refused entry to AFC competitions."

The decision has enraged the club, particularly coach Schweingruber, who says he feels "totally cheated" by the news.

"We have sent two letters to the AFC and tried to talk to them and try to explain, but they have just ignored us and just talk to the FFC [Football Federation of Cambodia]," says Schweingruber.

"So there is a limited amount that we can do. The AFC tell us the decision is final and just say there is zero tolerance, but we never did anything wrong, we just tried to clean up and cut people that were in our camp and that were not doing things the right way.

"But there was no involvement from our club at any wrong level ever and FFC took ages to report this to AFC and they and the FFC never really undertook any investigations or try not to understand more. So we feel we are very much, again, facing injustice."

> "We are a small club and have not that much influence...but our story should be pretty clear"
> Phnom Penh Crown coach Sam Schweingruber

Two days after December's championship Final play-off victory over Nagaworld – which Phnom Penh Crown won on penalties thanks to the heroics of 18-year-old goalkeeper Keo Soksela, who had been drafted in as a result of the suspensions – Schweingruber was involved in a near-fatal motorcycle accident.

And having defied doctors and the odds to make a startling recovery, he has returned to work and is determined to restore Phnom Penh Crown's reputation and regain their place in the AFC Cup.

"We filed an appeal to CAS and are now waiting to find out more on this process," says Schweingruber. "We are a small club and have not that much influence, we don't have enough staff and not a lawyer fully working with us, so things are not all easy. But our story should be pretty clear and should help us."

The support Phnom Penh Crown have received from the FFC has been minimal, and the federation's reluctance to accept any responsibility for alleged match-fixing under its own watch is alarming.

Tola May, the deputy general-secretary of the FFC, maintains that "Cambodian football has no problem with match-fixing" and remains adamant that outside help in looking at suspicious activities is "not needed". WS

➤ the former president of the German Football Association, is banned from all football activities for one year over "misconduct concerning the awarding of the FIFA World Cup".

Tuesday July 26

BRAZIL: Mano Menezes is named coach of Cruzeiro, seven months after he left the club for China's Shandong Luneng.
HOLLAND: Eighteen-year-old Kasper Dolberg scores on his Ajax debut as they draw 1-1 with PAOK in a Champions League qualifier.
ITALY: Juventus pay Napoli €90m for Argentinian striker Gonzalo Higuain, making him the most expensive South American player of all time.
SCOTLAND: Four months after they won the trophy, Ross County lose 3-2 to Alloa Athletic and go out of this season's League Cup.

Wednesday July 27

COLOMBIA: Miguel Borja scores the only goal of the return leg as Atletico Nacional beat Independiente del Valle 2-1 on aggregate to win the Libertadores Cup.
ENGLAND: This season's FA Cup will trial the use of a fourth sub during extra time of the quarter-finals, semi-finals and Final. Cesc Fabregas is sent off in Chelsea's 1-0 friendly win over Liverpool in the US.
SOUTH AFRICA: Mamelodi Sundowns are the first side through to the semi-finals of the African Champions League as they beat Zamalek 1-0 in the group stage.

Thursday July 28

CAMBODIA: Despite having a player sent off, Cambodia beat Singapore for the first time in more than 40 years, winning 2-1 in a friendly in Phnom Penh.
ZAMBIA: After MRI tests reveal that two of their players are over age, Zambia are disqualified from the COSAFA Under-17 Championship being staged in Mauritius.

Friday July 29

NORTHERN IRELAND: International striker Kyle Lafferty, who plays for English Championship side Norwich City, is charged by the FA over an alleged betting breach.

Saturday July 30

GERMANY: Wolfsburg midfielder Josuha Guilavogui breaks his neck in a 2-1 friendly loss to Portuguese club Sporting.
NORTHERN IRELAND: Cup holders Glenavon beat league champions ➤

Champions League

NICK BIDWELL

Upsetting the old order

Several new faces eye a group-stage spot

Shocks, late drama and new-frontier exploits were the order of the day in the Champions League third qualifying round. And nowhere did the whittling down process go with such a bang as at an ecstatic Tallaght Stadium in Dublin, where Republic of Ireland champions Dundalk beat BATE 3-0 to knock out the far more experienced Belarusians 4-1 on aggregate.

Thanks to two Dave McMillan headers and a cool Robbie Benson finish as the clock ticked down, the Lilywhites are now on the verge of history, just 180 minutes away from becoming the first League of Ireland side to reach the Champions League group stage.

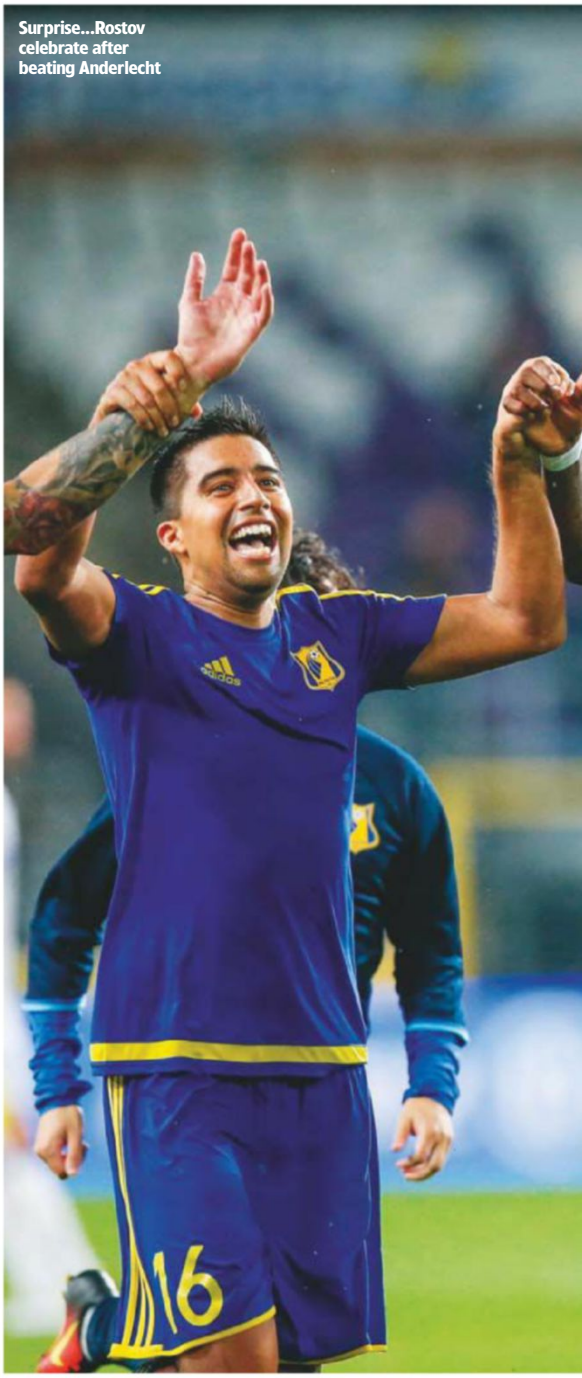
Unperturbed after only delivering a 2-2 draw at home to Serbian aristocrats Red Star in the first leg, Bulgarian title-holders Ludogorets were also in table-turning mood, stunning the 1991 Champions Cup-winners with a 4-2 extra-time win in Belgrade. The hero of the hour for Ludogorets was Brazilian attacking midfielder Wanderson, who claimed a hat-trick that included two goals in the additional half hour.

All over the continent, big-name casualties were left wondering what hit them. Shakhtar Donetsk, group-phase participants in each of the past six years, went out on penalties to Young Boys of Bern after losing 2-0 on the night in the Swiss capital. The much-decorated Anderlecht lost 2-0 on their own patch to go out to Russian surprise packets Rostov.

In another big upset, Olympiakos fell to the Israelis of Hapoel Be'er Sheva, the latter sealing a play-off ticket with a 1-0 victory in a tense affair on home soil. The Greek side have had an almost permanent seat at the Champions League top table, taking part in 17 of the last 19 editions. However, they found Be'er Sheva too tough a nut to crack and were put out when Shir Tzedek scored 12 minutes from the end of the second leg.

Be'er Sheva, who won their first domestic league title in 40 years last term, are now aiming to become only the sixth Israeli team to feature in the Champions League group phase.

Late, late shows proved a popular theme. Celtic needed a last-minute



Surprise...Rostov celebrate after beating Anderlecht

Last-gasp...Moussa Dembele scores for Celtic from the penalty spot

Moussa Dembele penalty to see off Astana – the Hoops' 2-1 victory in Glasgow giving them a 3-2 aggregate advantage – while in Nicosia, Cypriot champs APOEL took never-say-die to a whole new level, scoring all of their goals in their 3-0 win against Rosenborg in injury time. Giannis Gianniotas, Vander and Tomas De Vincenti did the honours.

Ajax also had to go the eleventh-hour route to progress, skipper Davy Klaassen netting two minutes from the end as the Amsterdam side edged out PAOK 2-1 in Salonika.

Back at Monaco following disastrous loan spells at Manchester United and Chelsea, Colombian front-man Radamel Falcao was among the goalscorers as the Monte Carlo side beat Fenerbahce 3-1 at the Stade Louis II, thus transforming a 2-1 first-leg deficit into a 4-3 victory. WS

Ecstatic...Dave McMillan was on target twice against BATE

Photo: Inpho

➤ Crusaders 1-0 in the season-opening Charity Shield.

SENEGAL: Niarry Tally, from the capital Dakar, win the Senegal FA Cup for the first time, beating Casa Sports 3-0 in the Final.

SINGAPORE: Top of the S.League and through to the semi-finals of the Singapore Cup, Albirex Niigata claim the first part of a possible domestic treble by beating Brunei DPMM 2-0 in the Singapore League Cup Final.

SOUTH KOREA: Jeonbuk Motors set a K-League record of 23 successive games without defeat as they beat Gwangju 3-0.

USA: Frank Lampard scores New York City's first-ever hat-trick as they end Colorado Rapids' 15-game unbeaten run with a 5-1 victory.

Sunday July 31

NAMIBIA: Despite losing 4-0 to South Africa in the group stage, Namibia win the COSAFA Under-17 Championship with a penalty shoot-out victory over the same opponents following a 1-1 draw in the Final.

POLAND: Zaglebie Lubin beat Nieciecza 2-0 to remain top of the table and set a club record of eight successive league victories.

Monday August 1

ARGENTINA: Edgardo Bauza leaves Sao Paulo in Brazil and becomes Argentina's national coach, replacing Gerardo Martino who quit after the Copa America Final defeat in June.

Tuesday August 2

SLOVENIA: Maribor reserves Damjan Marjanovic, 20, and Zoran Baljak, 21, are killed in a car accident on their way to training.

Wednesday August 3

BELGIUM: Spanish coach Robert Martinez, who previously managed Premier League side Everton, is appointed Belgium coach as Marc Wilmots' replacement.

BOLIVIA: Angel Guillermo Hoyos is announced as Bolivia's new national coach, succeeding Julio Cesar Baldivieso.

FRANCE: New signing Jeremy Menez loses part of an ear while making his Bordeaux debut when Lorient's Didier Ndong inadvertently steps on him during a friendly.

NORTHERN IRELAND: Portadown are suspended from all football for non-payment of disciplinary fees and will forfeit Saturday's opening league game away to Coleraine.

OLYMPICS: Sweden kick off the Rio Games with a 1-0 win over South Africa as the women's football tournament gets underway. WS

Review

France turn on the style

Champions...France skipper Lucas Tousart lifts the trophy

France claimed their third European Under-19 title as they swept aside Italy 4-0 in the Final of this year's tournament, played at the Rhein-Neckar-Arena, home of Bundesliga side Hoffenheim in Sinsheim.

The French youngsters will now lead the European challenge at next year's Under-20 World Cup, having followed in the footsteps of past Euro Under-19 winners Hugo Lloris and Yohan Cabaye (in 2005), and Antoine Griezmann and Alexandre Lacazette (in 2010).

Tournament top scorer Jean-Kevin Augustin gave France an early lead in the Final with a clever turn past the Italian defence and a dribble round the keeper. Further goals from Ludovic Blas, captain Lucas Tousart and Issa Diop completed a 4-0 scoreline that was the highest margin of victory in the Final since the inaugural tournament in 2002.

Midfielder Blas of Guingamp was man of the match in the Final, with Paris Saint-Germain's Augustin named player of the tournament after finishing with six goals, one ahead of Kylian Mbappe of Monaco.

Blas and Nantes' Armine Harit were impressive in midfield, while right-back Clement Michelin of Toulouse, who supplied the cross for France's second goal in the Final as well as scoring an own goal in the opening group game against England, also caught the eye.

England topped Group B after seeing off a French fightback in the first game to win 2-1. Striker Dominic Solanke, who spent last season at Holland's Vitesse on loan from Chelsea, scored against the French and added another against Holland, in which substitute Isaiah Brown, another of Chelsea's Vitesse contingent, grabbed an injury-time winner.

A 2-1 victory over Croatia in their last group game, confirmed England's first place in the group and a spot in the semi-finals, where they faced Italy.

France met Portugal, winners of Group A, in the other semi-final. The Portuguese topped their group after putting paid to German hopes of reaching the last four when they won one of the games of the tournament – a seven-goal thriller at the Mechatronik Arena in Aspech that ended 4-3 to Portugal.

Down...Italy's Simone Edera (7) and Andrea Favilli

Hoffenheim striker Phillipp Ochs converted an injury-time penalty to complete a hat-trick for the hosts but it was not enough.

Portugal took an early lead in the semi-final against the French, when Pedro Pacheco headed in a free-kick, but France responded strongly, equalising through Blas and then taking the lead through Mbappe, who added a third goal late on.

In the other semi-final, England were undone in Mannheim by the set-piece talents of Federico Dimarco. The Empoli full-back gave Italy the lead with a first-half penalty and then added a second with a well-taken free-kick in the second half. A late own goal by Alberto Picchi was too late to rescue English hopes of reaching the Final.

All four semi-finalists qualify for next year's Under-20 World Cup in South Korea. The fifth spot was decided by a play-off between Germany and Holland. The Germans triumphed 5-4 on penalties after the match had finished 3-3 after extra-time, as Michel Vlap appeared for the Dutch to become the first-ever fourth substitute used in a competitive match.

John Holmesdale

Club football

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs

Jul 6
Sao Paulo (Bra) 0
Atletico Nacional (Col) 2 (Borja 82, 88)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vigliano (Arg)
Sent off: Maicon (Sao Paulo) 73

Jul 7
Independiente del Valle (Ecu) 2 (Cabezas 62, Jose Angulo 76)
Boca Juniors (Arg) 1 (Perez 13)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

2nd legs

Jul13
Atletico Nacional 2 (Borja 16, pen 78)
Sao Paulo 1 (Calleri 9)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Polic (Chl)
Sent off: Lugano 79, Wesley 79 (both Sao Paulo)
Atletico Nacional 4-1 on agg

Jul14
Boca Juniors 2 (Pavon 4, 90+1)
Independiente del Valle 3 (L Caicedo 25, Cabezas 49, Julio Angulo 51)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Fedorczuk (Uru)
Independiente del Valle 5-3 on agg

Final

1st leg

Jul 20
Independiente del Valle 1 (Mina 87)
Atletico Nacional 1 (Berrio 36)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Caceres (Par)
Independiente: Azcona - Nunez, Mina, L Caicedo, Tellechea, Rizotto, Orejuela, Julio Angulo (Uchuari 70), Sornoza, Cabezas (Gonzales 70), Jose Angulo (Castillo 87).
Atletico Nacional: Armani - Bocanegra, Sanchez, Henriquez, Diaz, Perez (Guerra 76), Arias, Berrio, Torres (Blanco 80), Moreno (Ibarguen 88), Borja.

2nd leg

Jul 27
Atletico Nacional 1 (Borja 9)
Independiente del Valle 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)
Atletico Nacional 2-1 on agg
Atletico Nacional: Armani - Bocanegra, Sanchez, Henriquez, Diaz, Guerra (Arias 89), Mejia, Berrio, Torres, Moreno (Ibarguen 77), Borja (Rescaldani 81).
Independiente: Azcona - Nunez, Mina, L Caicedo, Tellechea (Castillo 88), Rizotto, Orejuela, Julio Angulo (Gonzales 72), Sornoza (Uchuari 46), Cabezas, Jose Angulo.

COLOMBIA

2016 – APERTURA: REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
I Medellin (Q)	20	11	7	2	33	17	40
At Nacional (Q)	20	12	3	5	42	20	39
Millonarios (Q)	20	11	4	5	30	17	37
Santa Fe (Q)	20	11	4	5	28	18	37
Junior (Q)	20	10	7	3	28	20	37
Rio Aguilas (Q)	20	10	4	6	30	23	34
Dep Cali (Q)	20	9	5	6	35	28	32
Cortulua (Q)	20	8	7	5	29	23	31
Patriotas	20	8	5	7	22	23	29
Once Caldas	20	7	5	8	26	22	26
Dep Pasto	20	5	9	6	19	23	24
Tolima	20	7	3	10	25	32	24
Bucaramanga	20	3	14	3	21	27	23
Jaguares	20	6	5	9	16	29	23
Envigado	20	4	7	9	21	22	19
Atletico Huila	20	5	4	11	18	26	19
La Equidad	20	4	7	9	20	30	19
Boyaca Chico	20	3	8	9	17	28	17
A Petrolera	20	4	5	11	24	38	17
Fortaleza	20	4	3	13	16	34	15

The top 8 qualified for the apertura championship play-offs

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Jun1/2; 2nd legs - Jun 4/5
Cortulua v Santa Fe 2-1, 1-1 (agg 3-2)
Deportivo Cali v Independiente Medellin 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)
Junior v Millonarios 2-0, 2-4 (agg 4-4, Junior 4-2 on pens)
Rionegro Aguilas v Atletico Nacional 1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2, Atletico Nacional 5-4 on pens)

Semi-finals

1st legs - Jun 8/9; 2nd legs - Jun11/12
Cortulua v Independiente Medellin 1-2, 2-1 (agg 3-3, Indep Medellin 8-7 on pens)
Junior v Atletico Nacional 1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Junior 4-2 on pens)

2016 Apertura Championship Final

1st leg - Jun15; 2nd leg - Jun19
Junior v Independiente Medellin 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)

ECUADOR

2016 – 1ST STAGE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona[1]	22	15	2	5	51	19	47
Emelec	22	13	4	5	37	23	43
El Nacional	22	10	6	6	32	28	36
Dep Cuenca	22	9	7	6	29	25	34
Independiente	22	10	4	8	28	28	34
LDU Quito	22	8	7	7	20	23	31
Univ Catolica	22	6	10	6	27	27	28
River Ecuador	22	8	3	11	29	35	27
F'za Amarilla	22	6	6	10	22	28	24
Delfin	22	5	8	9	23	30	23
Aucas	22	4	7	11	21	34	19
Mushuc Runa	22	3	6	13	19	38	15

[1]Barcelona will meet the 2nd stage winners in a play-off for the 2016 championship

URUGUAY

2015-16 – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Plaza Col[1]	15	9	5	1	20	9	32
Penarol	15	8	3	4	25	18	27
Sud America	15	7	4	4	17	16	25
Wanderers	15	7	3	5	31	21	24
Nacional	15	7	3	5	21	17	24
Cerro	15	7	3	5	17	15	24
Fenix	15	6	5	4	18	13	23
Liverpool	15	7	1	7	16	18	22
Rentistas (R)[2]	15	6	3	6	18	17	21
Defensor	15	6	3	6	23	29	21
V Teresa (R)[2]	15	5	4	6	15	19	19
Juventud	15	4	6	5	19	19	18
River Plate	15	5	3	7	15	16	18
Racing	15	3	5	7	19	24	14
Danubio	15	3	4	8	18	25	13
El T Sisley (R)[2]	15	2	1	12	14	30	7

[1]Plaza Colonia entered Overall Championship Play-off against apertura winners Penarol
[2]The 3 teams with the lowest average points per game over the 2 most recent seasons were relegated

2015-16 Overall Championship Play-off

Jun 12: Penarol 3 Plaza Colonia 1 (aet).

EUROPE

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

1st legs - Jun 28; 2nd legs - Jul 5/6
FC Santa Coloma (And) v Alashkert (Arm) 0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3); Flora Tallinn (Est) v Lincoln Red Imps (Gib) 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3); The New Saints (Wal) v Tre Penne (SaM) 2-1, 3-0 (agg 5-1); Valletta (Mlt) v B36 (Far) 1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Valletta on away goals)

2nd qualifying round

(teams with country abbreviation entered at this stage)
1st legs - Jul12/13; 2nd legs - Jul19/20
BATE Borisov (Bls) v Seinajoki (Fin) 2-0, 2-2 (agg 4-2); Crusaders (NI) v Copenhagen (Den) 0-3, 0-6 (agg 0-9); Dinamo Tbilisi (Geo) v Alashkert 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1); Dundalk (RoI) v FH (Ice) 1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3, Dundalk on away goals); Hapoel Beer Sheva (Isr) v Sheriff (Mol) 3-2, 0-0 (agg 3-2); Lincoln Red Imps v Celtic (Sco) 1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3); Ludogorets (Bul) v Mladost (Mne) 2-0, 3-0 (agg 5-0); Olimpija Ljubljana (Sln) v Trencin (Slk) 3-4, 3-2 (agg 6-6, Trencin on away goals); Partizani[1] (Alb) v Ferencvaros (Hun) 1-1, 1-1 (aet) (agg 2-2, Partizani 3-1 on pens); Qarabag (Aze) v F91 Dudelange (Lux) 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1); Rosenborg (Nor) v Norrkoping (Swe) 3-1, 2-3 (agg 5-4); Salzburg (Aut) v Liepaja (Lat) 1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0); The New Saints v APOEL Nicosia (Cyp) 0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3); Valletta v Red Star Belgrade (Ser) 1-2, 1-2 (agg 2-4); Vardar Skopje (Mac) v Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 1-2, 2-3 (agg 3-5); Zalgiris (Lit) v Astana (Kaz) 0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2); Zrinjski (Bos) v Legia Warsaw (Pol) 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)

[1]Partizani took the place of Albanian champions Skenderbeu, excluded because of match-fixing

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

1st legs - Jun 28/30; 2nd legs - Jul 5-7
Aberdeen (Sco) v Fola (Lux) 3-1, 0-1 (agg 3-2); Admira (Aut) v Spartak Myjava (Slk) 1-1, 3-2 (agg 4-3); AEK Larnaca (Cyp) v Folgore (SaM) 3-0, 3-1 (agg 6-1); AIK Stockholm (Swe) v Bala (Wal) 2-0, 2-0 (agg 4-0); Aktobe (Kaz) v MTK (Hun) 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3); Atlantas (Lit) v HJK (Fin) 0-2, 1-1 (agg 1-3); Balzan (Mlt) v Neftchi (Aze) 0-2, 2-1 (agg 2-3); Banants (Arm) v Omonia (Cyp) 0-1, 1-4 (aet) (agg 1-5); Beroe (Bul) v Radnik (Bos) 0-0, 2-0 (agg 2-0); Bokelj (Mne) v Vojvodina (Ser) 1-1, 0-5 (agg 1-6); Breidablik (Ice) v Jelgava (Lat) 2-3, 2-2 (agg 4-5); Connah's Quay (Wal) v Stabaek (Nor) 0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0); Cukaricki (Ser) v Ordabasy (Kaz) 3-0, 3-3 (agg 6-3); Differdange (Lux) v Cliftonville (NI) 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3); Dila (Geo) v Shirak (Arm) 1-0, 0-1 (aet) (agg 1-1, Shirak 4-1 on pens); Dinamo Minsk (Bls) v Spartaks Jurmala (Lat) 2-1, 2-0 (agg 4-1); Domzale (Sln) v Lusitans (And) 3-1, 2-1 (agg 5-2); Europa (Gib) v Pyunik (Arm) 2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2); Hearts (Sco) v Infonet (Est) 2-1, 4-2 (agg 6-3); IFK Gothenburg (Swe) v Llandudno Town (Wal) 5-0, 2-1 (agg 7-1); Kapaz (Aze) v Dacia (Mol) 0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0); KR (Ice) v Glenavon (NI) 2-1, 6-0 (agg 8-1); Kukes (Alb) v Rudar Pljevlja (Mne) 1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1); La Fiorita (SaM) v Debrecen (Hun) 0-5, 0-2 (agg 0-7); Levadia (Est) v HB (Far) 1-1, 2-0 (agg 3-1); Linfield (NI) v Cork City (RoI) 0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2); Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) v Gorica (Sln) 3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0); Midtjylland (Den) v Suduva (Lit) 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0); NSI (Far) v Shakhtyor (Bls) 0-2, 0-5 (agg 0-7); Odd (Nor) v Mariehamn (Fin) 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1); Qabala (Aze) v Samtredia (Geo) 5-1, 1-2 (agg 6-3); Rabotnicki (Mac) v Buducnost (Mne) 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2); Shamrock Rovers (RoI) v RoPS (Fin) 0-2, 1-1 (agg 1-3); Shkendija (Mac) v Cracovia (Pol) 2-0, 2-1 (agg 4-1); Siroki Brijeg (Bos) v Birkirkara (Mlt) 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3); Slavia Sofia (Bul) v Zaglebie (Pol) 1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3); Sloboda (Bos) v Beitar Jerusalem (Isr) 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1); Spartak Trnava (Slk) v Hibernians (Mlt) 3-0, 3-0 (agg 6-0); St Patrick's (RoI) v Jeunesse Esch (Lux) 1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, St Patrick's on away goals); Teuta (Alb) v Kairat (Kaz) 0-1, 0-5 (agg 0-6); Trakai (Lit) v Kalju (Est) 2-1, 1-4 (agg 3-5); UE Santa Coloma (And) v Lokomotiva (Cro) 1-3, 1-4 (agg 2-7); Vaduz (Lie) v Sileks (Mac) 3-1, 2-1 (agg 5-2); Valur (Ice) v Brondby (Den) 1-4, 0-6 (agg 1-10); Ventspils (Lat) v Vikingur (Far) 2-0, 2-0 (agg 4-0); Videoton (Hun) v Zaria Balti (Mol) 3-0, 0-2 (agg 3-2); Zimbru (Mol) v Chikhura (Geo) 0-1, 3-2 (agg 3-3, Zimbru on away goals)

Partizani (Alb) v Slovan Bratislava (Slk) - after the 1st leg, a 0-0 draw, Partizani were given a place in the Champions League following the exclusion from that competition of Albanian champions Skenderbeu for match-fixing; as a consequence the 2nd leg against Slovan Bratislava was cancelled and the Slovak team proceeded by default to the Europa League 2nd qualifying round

2nd qualifying round

(teams with country abbreviation entered at this stage)
1st legs - Jul14; 2nd legs - Jul 20/21
Aberdeen v Ventspils 3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0); Admira v Kapaz 1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0); AIK Stockholm v Europa 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0); Austria Vienna (Aut) v Kukes 1-0, 4-1 (agg 5-1); Beitar Jerusalem v Omonia 1-0, 2-3 (agg 3-3, Beitar on away goals); Beroe v HJK 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2); Birkirkara v Hearts 0-0, 2-1 (agg 2-1); Cliftonville v AEK Larnaca 2-3, 0-2 (agg 2-5); CSM Studentesc (Rom) v Hajduk Split (Cro) 2-2, 1-2 (agg 3-4); Debrecen v Torpedo Zhodino (Bls) 1-2, 0-1 (agg 1-3); Dinamo Minsk v St Patrick's 1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1); Genk (Blg) v Buducnost 2-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 2-2, Genk 4-2 on pens); Giannina (Gre) v Odd 3-0, 1-3 (aet) (agg 4-3); Hacken (Swe) v Cork City 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2); Hibernian (Sco) v Brondby 0-1, 1-0 (aet) (agg 1-1, Brondby 5-3 on pens); Kairat v Maccabi Tel Aviv 1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3); KR v Grasshopper (Swi) 3-3, 1-2 (agg 4-5); Levadia v Slavia Prague (CzR) 3-1, 0-2 (agg 3-3, Slavia on away goals); Maccabi Haifa (Isr) v Kalju 1-1, 1-1 (aet) (agg 2-2, Kalju 5-3 on pens); Maribor (Sln) v Levski Sofia (Bul) 0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1, Maribor on away goals); Midtjylland v Vaduz 3-0, 2-2 (agg 5-2); MTK v Qabala 1-2, 0-2 (agg 1-4); Neftchi v Shkendija 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1); Partizan Belgrade (Ser) v Zaglebie 0-0, 0-0 (aet) (agg 0-0, Zaglebie 4-3 on pens); Piast (Pol) v IFK Gothenburg 0-3, 0-0 (agg 0-3); RoPS v Lokomotiva 1-1, 0-3 (agg 1-4); Shakhtyor v Domzale 1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3); Shirak v Spartak Trnava 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3); Slovan Bratislava v Jelgava 0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3); SonderjyskE (Den) v Stromsgodset (Nor) 2-1, 2-2 (aet) (agg 4-3); Videoton v Cukaricki 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1); Vojvodina v Connah's Quay 1-0, 2-1 (agg 3-1); Zimbru v Osmanlispor (Tur) 2-2, 0-5 (agg 2-7)

KOSOVO

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Feronikeli (C)	33	21	6	6	53	27	69
Hajvalia	33	17	8	8	44	26	59
Trepca '89	33	16	8	9	53	30	56
Besa	33	16	5	12	37	27	53
Gjilani	33	14	7	12	29	27	49
Llapi	33	12	8	13	44	44	44
Liria	33	12	8	13	35	45	44
Prishtina	33	12	7	14	29	34	43
Drenica[1]	33	12	4	17	38	48	40
Drita[1]	33	9	9	15	33	43	36
Istogu (R)	33	10	4	19	24	40	34
Vushtrria (R)	33	6	8	19	24	52	26

[1]Stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-offs

AFRICA

BURKINA FASO

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RC Kadiogo (C)	30	17	9	4	34	14	60
US Ouagad'ou	30	15	14	1	32	12	59
RC Bobo	30	17	5	8	35	16	56
ASFA Yen'ga	30	13	6	11	27	25	45
Santos	30	10	14	6	31	21	44
KOZAF	30	11	11	8	31	21	44
Etoile Filante	30	10	9	11	24	28	39
Sonabel	30	8	14	8	19	20	38
Bouloum'kou	30	9	10	11	20	25	37
Forces Armees	30	9	9	12	24	30	36
Majestic	30	9	8	13	25	30	35
AJEB	30	9	8	13	20	29	35
ASF Bobo	30	7	12	11	27	33	33
Comoe	30	6	15	9	11	19	33
Yatenga (R)	30	8	7	15	23	33	31
Bankuy (R)	30	2	9	19	11	38	15

BURUNDI

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vital'O (C)	30	24	2	4	71	17	74
Messager N	30	16	9	5	40	19	57
Muzinga	30	15	8	7	41	21	53
Aigle Noir	30	11	14	5	33	21	47
LLB	30	13	7	10	43	29	46
Bujumbura C	30	11	10	9	30	19	43
Athletico O	30	10	12	8	36	29	42
Olympic Star	30	10	11	9	26	26	41
Flambeau	30	9	10	11	30	33	37
Messager B	30	8	10	12	25	41	34
Olympic M'ra	30	7	13	10	23	39	34
Nyanza Utd	30	6	13	11	32	44	31
Inter Star	30	7	9	14	22	35	30
Les Crocos (R)	30	7	8	15	18	35	29
Jeunes Ath (R)	30	6	6	18	19	51	24
Elephants (R)	30	3	12	15	23	53	21

CAPE VERDE ISLANDS

2016 Championship Final

1st leg - Jul 2; 2nd leg - Jul 9
Mindelense v Academica Porto Novo 0-1, 1-0 (aet) (agg 1-1, Mindelense 5-4 on pens)

World Service

DJIBOUTI

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ali Sabieh (C)	18	15	2	1	49	12	47
Port	18	12	2	4	30	17	38
Gendarmerie	18	12	2	4	36	18	38
Garde Rep'can	18	11	1	6	37	20	34
Universite	18	8	5	5	29	20	29
Dikhil	18	7	4	7	27	29	25
Hopital B'ala	18	5	1	12	17	32	16
CDE-Colas	18	5	0	13	18	44	15
Tadjourah (R)	18	4	1	13	16	38	13
SDVK (R)	18	2	0	16	15	44	6

DR CONGO

2015-16 – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TP Mazembe (C)	14	10	4	0	27	4	34
AS Vita	14	8	5	1	23	6	29
Sanga Balende	14	8	4	2	26	7	28
Motema P'be	14	6	3	5	16	19	21
Shark XI	14	5	3	6	18	15	18
Dauphin Noir	14	2	6	6	10	23	12
St Eloi Lupopo	14	2	3	9	8	21	9
Muungano	14	0	2	12	3	36	2

EGYPT

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahly (C)	34	23	7	4	65	24	76
Zamalek	34	20	9	5	49	25	69
Smouha	34	13	16	5	45	37	55
Al Masry	34	13	16	5	50	37	55
Wadi Degla	34	14	12	8	38	31	54
Ismaily	34	15	8	11	47	36	53
Entag Harby	34	13	13	8	38	26	52
El Dakhleyh	34	13	11	10	35	33	50
ENPPI	34	12	11	11	42	39	47
Misr El Makasa	34	12	11	11	47	41	47
Petrojet	34	12	10	12	35	31	46
Al Gaish	34	9	14	11	34	35	41
Al Mokawloon	34	10	11	13	34	42	41
Al Ittihad	34	11	6	17	26	44	39
Aswan	34	8	11	15	28	44	35
El Shorta (R)	34	3	16	15	30	48	25
H Hodood (R)	34	4	7	23	17	52	19
Ghazl M'lla (R)	34	0	13	21	16	51	13

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

2016 Championship Final

Jul 19: Sony Ela Nguema 0 Leones Vegetarianos 0 (Sony Ela Nguema 3-2 on pens).

ETHIOPIA

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St George (C)	26	16	7	3	37	12	55
Ethiop Coffee	26	13	6	7	28	21	45
Adama	26	13	5	8	31	21	44
Dedebit	26	11	6	9	37	33	39
Sidama Coffee	26	8	12	6	25	23	36
Com'cial Bank	26	7	14	5	19	14	35
Awassa	26	9	8	9	32	35	35
Welayta Dicha	26	8	11	7	18	21	35
Arba Minch	26	7	12	7	25	20	33
Defence Force	26	7	12	7	22	20	33
Dire Dawa	26	8	6	12	22	31	30
EEPCO	26	8	6	12	23	34	30
Dash'n Beer (R)	26	6	10	10	22	28	28
Hadiya H'na (R)	26	1	5	20	22	50	8

GABON

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mounana (C)	26	18	4	4	51	17	58
Mangasport	26	17	4	5	44	20	55
Pelican	26	13	8	5	40	26	47
US Bitam	26	12	10	4	28	17	46
Missile	26	10	6	10	28	26	36
Std Mandji	26	9	9	8	29	30	36
Centre Mberi	26	9	8	9	35	32	35
Akanda	26	8	9	9	26	24	33
Port-Gentil	26	6	14	6	27	26	32
Std Migoveen	26	6	6	14	25	43	24
Olympique	26	6	6	14	26	50	24
FC 105	26	3	13	10	20	29	22
Oyem (R)	26	5	7	14	22	36	22
Nguen'A'ku (R)	26	5	6	15	28	53	21

GAMBIA

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
GPA (C)	22	11	9	2	21	11	42
Brikama Utd	22	10	11	1	23	8	41
Real Banjul	22	11	8	3	24	12	41
Gamtel	22	7	10	5	21	18	31
Hawks	22	5	12	5	19	18	27
Steve Biko	22	6	7	9	10	13	25
Bombada	22	5	9	8	25	29	24
Samger	22	4	12	6	20	24	24
Armed Forces	22	4	11	7	13	18	23
Serrekunda	22	3	11	8	13	19	20
Wallidan (R)	22	4	8	10	13	26	20
Banjul Utd (R)	22	2	12	8	22	28	18

GUINEA

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Horoya (C)	22	15	5	2	40	9	50
Kaloum	22	13	5	4	33	19	44
Fello Star	22	12	7	3	31	17	43
Hafia	22	10	10	2	29	11	40
Soumba	22	7	8	7	21	25	29
CI Kamsar	22	7	4	11	19	21	25
ASFAG	22	5	8	9	22	27	23
Gangan	22	5	8	9	15	24	23
Atl Coleah	22	6	4	12	17	32	22
Satellite	22	4	9	9	14	26	21
Ashanti GB (R)	22	6	3	13	17	30	21
F Olympiq (R)	22	2	9	11	12	29	15

MAURITIUS

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ASPL 2000 (C)	36	24	8	4	75	23	80
Pamplem'sses	36	19	9	8	72	42	66
Cure Sylv'ter	36	18	10	8	67	37	64
Q'tre Bornes	36	17	11	8	44	33	62
Cercle Joachim	36	13	12	11	42	35	51
P Riv're Noire	36	11	10	15	47	62	43
Riv Rempart[1]	36	11	8	17	53	73	40
GRSE	36	8	8	20	31	67	32
Chamarel (R)	36	7	8	21	34	68	29
C Starlight (R)	36	7	6	23	39	64	27

[1] *1pt deducted*

MOROCCO

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FUS (C)	30	16	10	4	40	21	58
Wydad	30	16	8	6	34	19	56
Ittihad T	30	14	8	8	36	23	50
FAR	30	13	8	9	40	35	47
Raja	30	13	8	9	48	30	47
Moghreb	30	12	7	11	34	43	43
RSB	30	10	13	7	24	19	43
Hassania	30	11	8	11	44	46	41
Olympic Safi	30	9	10	11	23	27	37
Chabab RH	30	10	6	14	27	34	36
Kenitra	30	10	5	15	26	37	35
Olympique K	30	9	7	14	26	35	34
Difaa	30	7	13	10	26	30	34
Kawkab	30	7	9	14	23	30	30
MC Oujda (R)	30	7	8	15	26	41	29
Maghreb (R)	30	5	14	11	24	31	29

RWANDA

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
APR (C)	30	21	4	5	43	18	67
Rayon Sports	30	17	10	3	50	12	61
Mukura	30	19	3	8	44	25	60
AS Kigali	30	16	8	6	45	21	56
Police	30	14	10	6	47	26	52
Kiyovu Sports	30	13	7	10	36	31	46
Bugesera	30	10	7	13	23	35	37
Sunrise	30	8	11	11	28	33	35
Gicumbi	30	8	10	12	26	38	34
Marines	30	7	12	11	19	28	33
Espoir	30	7	12	11	20	33	33
Etincelles	30	8	8	14	29	41	32
Amagaju	30	6	12	12	20	38	30
Musanze	30	7	8	15	27	40	29
Rwamag'a (R)	30	6	7	17	20	32	25
Muhanga (R)	30	5	7	18	24	50	22

SENEGAL

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Goree (C)	26	11	9	6	25	17	42
Jaraaf	26	11	6	9	31	26	39
Diambars	26	9	11	6	30	23	38
Linguere	26	10	8	8	32	29	38
Guediawaye	26	8	12	6	26	22	36
Casa Sport	26	9	9	8	29	27	36
Niarry Tally	26	8	11	7	19	19	35
Ouakam	26	6	15	5	21	20	33
Stade Mbour	26	7	12	7	20	20	33
Ndiambour	26	9	5	12	20	28	32
M Petite Cote	26	7	10	9	20	19	31
AS Douanes	26	7	9	10	23	30	30
Suneor (R)	26	7	9	10	17	24	30
Olympique (R)	26	5	10	11	20	29	25

SOMALIA

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Banadir (C)	18	12	6	0	36	8	42
Dekedda	18	10	6	2	28	15	36
Jeenyo Utd	18	9	6	3	37	19	33
Heegan	18	7	9	2	31	14	30
Horseed	18	7	5	6	26	24	26
Gaadiidka	18	6	6	6	18	16	24
Elman	18	5	6	7	17	20	21
Signjet	18	4	3	11	20	36	15
Sahafi (R)	18	3	4	11	30	38	13
Mogadishu (R)	18	0	3	15	13	66	3

TUNISIA

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Etoile Sahel (C)	30	24	5	1	57	17	77
Esperance T	30	23	3	4	60	21	72
CS Sfaxien	30	23	3	4	57	21	72
ES Metlaoui	30	15	4	11	36	26	49
CA Bizertin	30	11	8	11	21	21	41
Club Africain	30	11	6	13	42	38	39
Sidi Bouzid	30	11	4	15	25	38	37
Hammam-Lif	30	10	6	14	27	32	36
JS Kairouan	30	10	6	14	27	37	36
AS Marsa	30	9	7	14	25	35	34
Ben Guerdane	30	8	9	13	21	30	33
Std Gabesien	30	8	9	13	28	35	33
Esperance Z	30	8	9	13	30	39	33
EGS Gafsa (R)	30	6	12	12	31	41	30
Kasserine (R)	30	5	8	17	17	49	23
Std Tunis'n[1] (R)	30	4	9	17	17	41	18

[1] *3pts deducted for not fulfilling last 3 fixtures*

UGANDA

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
KCCA (C)	30	16	9	5	39	21	57
Vipers	30	14	11	5	37	22	53
Express	30	15	8	7	39	28	53
SC Villa	30	13	11	6	36	23	50
URA	30	12	11	7	47	31	47
BUL	30	14	5	11	32	28	47
Soana	30	12	9	9	44	41	45
Police	30	11	11	8	31	28	44
Sadolin Paints	30	12	7	11	22	25	43
JMC Hippos	30	10	8	12	26	23	38
The Saints	30	10	7	13	30	28	37
Bright Stars	30	9	10	11	20	23	37
Lweza	30	9	7	14	26	40	34
Simba (R)	30	7	11	12	27	27	32
SC Vic Univ (R)	30	5	4	21	17	60	19
Maroons (R)	30	3	7	20	15	40	16

ASIA

BAHRAIN

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hidd (C)	18	12	6	0	39	15	42
Al Muharraq	18	9	5	4	31	21	32
Malkiya	18	7	6	5	23	20	27
Al Riffa	18	7	2	9	22	26	23
East Riffa	18	6	4	8	22	18	22
Al Ahli	18	5	7	6	22	21	22
Manama	18	6	3	9	17	27	21
Al Hala	18	5	5	8	22	31	20
Busaiteen (R)	18	6	2	10	17	31	20
Sitra (R)	18	4	6	8	20	25	18

GUAM

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rovers (C)	20	17	0	3	137	24	51
Shipyard	20	15	1	4	108	31	46
Q Distributors	20	12	1	7	81	57	37
Strykers	20	10	0	10	89	72	30
Sthn Cobras	20	4	1	15	67	129	13
Sidekicks	20	0	1	19	13	182	1

IRAQ

2015-16 – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Zawra'a (C)	7	4	3	0	13	5	15
Naft Al Wasat	7	4	2	1	10	6	14
Al Talaba	7	3	3	1	8	6	12
Quwa Jawiya	7	3	0	4	11	7	9
Al Naft	7	2	3	2	9	9	9
Al Mina'a	7	2	2	3	9	13	8
Al Shorta	7	1	2	4	6	12	5
Baghdad SC	7	1	1	5	6	14	4

JAPAN

2016 – 1ST STAGE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kashima[1]	17	12	3	2	29	10	39
Kawasaki	17	11	5	1	33	15	38
Urawa	17	10	3	4	26	16	33
Sanfrecce	17	8	5	4	32	18	29
Omiya	17	7	5	5	17	18	26
Gamba	17	7	3	7	22	20	24
Kashiwa	17	6	6	5	20	21	24
Jubilo	17	6	5	6	21	23	23
Tokyo	17	6	5	6	16	18	23
Vegalta	17	7	2	8	20	25	23
Yokohama	17	6	4	7	21	19	22
Vissel	17	5	5	7	23	25	20
Albirex	17	4	6	7	19	25	18
Nagoya	17	4	5	8	24	29	17
Sagan	17	4	5	8	10	15	17
Shonan	17	4	4	9	18	27	16
Ventforet	17	3	6	8	18	31	15
Avispa	17	2	5	10	11	25	11

[1] *Kashima qualify for the end-of-season championship play-offs*

LEBANON

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Safa (C)	22	16	4	2	46	18	52
Al Ahed	22	16	3	3	54	14	51
Al Nejmeh	22	13	6	3	35	19	45
Al Ansar	22	12	6	4	37	20	42
Al Sahel	22	10	5	7	37	27	35
Tripoli SC	22	7	6	9	28	31	27
Racing	22	7	5	10	19	27	26
Al Nabi Sheet[1]	22	9	2	11	31	30	23
Al Egtmaaey	22	6	5	11	29	43	23
Salam Zgharta	22	4	4	14	25	44	16
Al Ghazieh (R)	22	0	10	12	18	41	10
Al Hikma (R)	22	1	6	15	17	62	9

[1] *6pts deducted*

MACAU

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benfica (C)	18	17	1	0	78	4	52
Tak Chun Ka I	18	13	2	3	46	12	41
Sporting	18	11	4	3	50	15	37
Monte Carlo	18	11	2	5	79	19	35
Chao Pak Kei	18	10	3	5	42	17	33
Lai Chi	18	5	4	9	39	46	19
Policia	18	3	3	12	17	57	12
Kei Lun	18	3	3	12	16	59	12
Casa P'gal (R)	18	2	4	12	19	92	10
Chuac Lun (R)	18	0	4	14	10	75	4

PALESTINE (Gaza)

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
K'mat Rafah (C)	22	12	8	2	32	19	44
Al Sadaqa	22	10	7	5	32	23	37
Shabab Rafah	22	9	8	5	29	22	35
Gaza SC	22	10	5	7	39	35	35
Al Ittihad Sh'a	22	8	8	6	32	30	32
Shabab KY	22	9	4	9	35	34	31
Khadamat KY	22	6	9	7	25	26	27
K'mat Shatea	22	8	3	11	22	31	27
Al Ittihad KY	22	6	8	8	30	28	26
Al Hilal Gaza	22	7	5	10	23	27	26
S'b Jabalia (R)	22	7	4	11	21	26	25
K Maghazi (R)	22	3	5	14	20	39	14

PALESTINE (West Bank)

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sh Al Khalil (C)	22	13	6	3	38	22	45
Al Khader	22	10	6	6	42	32	36
Alsamu	22	8	8	6	29	27	32
Ahli Al Khalil	22	8	7	7	25	22	31
Thaqafi	22	7	9	6	32	33	30
Al Dahiriya	22	7	7	8	36	31	28
Markaz Balata	22	7	7	8	30	40	28
Hilal Al Quds	22	7	6	9	24	21	27
Taraji Wadi	22	6	8	8	22	27	26
Dora	22	6	7	9	21	28	25
Silwan (R)	22	5	10	7	21	29	25
Al Am'ari (R)	22	4	7	11	19	27	19

CONCACAF

ARUBA

2015-16 Championship Final

1st leg - Jun15; 2nd leg - Jun19

Dakota v RCA 0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)

BARBADOS

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BlackBirds (C)	18	15	0	3	80	19	45
BDF	18	14	2	2	59	13	44
Weymouth W	18	10	4	4	34	19	34
Paradise	18	10	4	4	37	25	34
Rendezvous	18	7	1	10	36	53	22
Notre Dame	18	6	3	9	27	43	21
Brittons Hill	18	5	5	8	25	32	20
Belfield	18	6	2	10	31	43	20
Empire Club (R)	18	4	3	11	28	45	15
Pinelands (R)	18	0	2	16	20	85	2

CANADA

2016 Championship Final

1st leg - Jun 21; 2nd leg - Jun 29

Toronto v Vancouver Whitecaps 1-0, 1-2
(agg 2-2, Toronto on away goals)

CAYMAN ISLANDS

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Scholars (C)	21	16	3	2	55	15	51
Elite	21	14	4	3	48	25	46
Academy	21	8	3	10	34	35	27
Bodden Town	21	7	5	9	31	33	26
Cayman Ath	21	6	6	9	33	44	24
Roma United	21	7	3	11	23	37	24
Sunset[1]	21	5	5	11	24	45	20
George T'n (R)	21	4	5	12	21	35	17

[1] *Stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off*

CUBA

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Villa Clara (C)	18	11	3	4	33	19	36
Guantanamo	18	11	3	4	32	19	36
La Habana	18	11	2	5	34	17	35
Santiago[1]	17	9	4	4	21	14	31
Ciego de Avila	18	7	5	6	32	24	26
Las Tunas	18	6	5	7	28	33	23
Granma	18	5	4	9	27	40	19
Camaguey	18	5	3	10	18	25	18
I Juventud[1]	17	4	3	10	17	30	15
Cienfuegos (R)	18	3	2	13	11	32	11

[1] *Remaining game not played*

FRENCH GUIANA

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
US Matoury (C)	22	17	2	3	46	17	75
Le Geldar	22	14	2	6	45	25	66
CSC Cayenne	22	12	3	7	35	27	61
Agouado	22	12	2	8	45	40	60
Etoile	22	8	8	6	37	36	54
Macouria	22	6	9	7	39	36	49
Remire	22	6	8	8	36	38	48
SC Kourou	22	6	7	9	28	29	47
Iracoubo	22	6	5	11	32	45	45
Grand Santi[2]	22	8	3	11	31	37	45
Cosma (R)	22	3	7	12	24	38	38
Montjoly[3] (R)	22	5	2	15	23	53	37

[1] *4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat*
[2] *4pts deducted*
[3] *2pts deducted*

GUADELOUPE

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Unite St R (C)	26	19	4	3	50	20	87
Moulien	26	14	8	4	38	18	76
La Gauloise	26	14	6	6	43	29	74
Baie-Mahault	26	12	7	7	32	21	69
Juventus	26	11	6	9	28	25	65
Siroco	26	10	7	9	32	29	63
Phare Canal	26	8	12	6	23	20	62
Gourbeyrienne	26	7	8	11	16	27	55
Amical GBMG	26	7	7	12	22	27	54
Arsenal	26	7	7	12	22	29	54
Red Star	26	8	3	15	21	29	53
L'Etoile	26	5	11	10	17	26	52
Solidarite[2]	26	5	8	13	17	31	48
Amical M'sat	26	5	6	15	22	52	47

[1] *4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat*
[2] *1pt deducted*

GUYANA

2015-16 Championship Final

Jun 26: Slingerz 1 Alpha United 0.

HAITI

2016 Ouverture (opening) Championship Final

1st leg - May 26; 2nd leg - May 29

FICA v Racing Gonaives 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)

MARTINIQUE

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Golden Lion (C)	26	19	5	2	58	19	88
Franciscain	26	15	6	5	52	18	77
Colonial	26	14	8	4	48	19	76
Case-Pilote	26	14	3	9	38	29	71
Golden Star	26	11	8	7	29	31	67
Riviere-Pilote	26	10	8	8	43	33	64
Essor-Pre'tain	26	10	7	9	32	26	63
Good Luck	26	9	8	9	29	33	61
Excelsior[2]	26	10	3	13	30	52	58
New Star	26	6	12	8	33	37	56
Aiglon	26	7	9	10	24	35	56
Samaritaine (R)	26	8	4	14	31	38	54
Emulation (R)	26	5	5	16	21	46	46
Marinoise (R)	26	0	2	24	11	63	28

[1] *4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat*
[2] *1pt deducted for abandoning a game*

ST KITTS & NEVIS

2015-16 Championship Final

(best of 3 legs; aggregate score not considered)

1st leg - Jun10; 2nd leg - Jun14; 3rd leg - Jun17

Conaree v Cayon 2-0, 0-1, 0-0 (aet)
(1 leg each, Cayon 3-1 on pens)

SURINAM

2015-16 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter M'poe (C)	18	12	4	2	42	21	40
Transvaal	18	9	5	4	33	24	32
Leo Victor[1]	17	8	3	6	22	16	27
Nishan 42	18	7	5	6	38	31	26
WBC	18	8	2	8	40	37	26
Botopasie	18	7	3	8	33	38	24
Robinhood	18	6	3	9	27	31	21
Takdier Boys	18	5	5	8	24	30	20
Notch[1]	17	6	3	8	23	30	18
Excelsior (R)	18	3	3	12	23	47	12

[1] *Notch had 3pts deducted for failing to prepare their pitch for the game against Leo Victor. The game was not rescheduled*

TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS

2016 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Academy (C)	12	9	1	2	38	28	28
Full Physic	12	9	0	3	45	17	27
Beaches	12	8	0	4	35	29	24
Cheshire Hall	12	6	2	4	38	30	20
SWA Sharks	12	5	0	7	32	19	15
Teachers	12	3	1	8	25	58	10
Grand Turk Utd	12	0	0	12	8	40	0

Internationals

2017 EAST ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

1st preliminary round

Played in Dededo, Guam

Jun 30
Macau 2 (Leong Ka Hang 38, Duarte 44)
Mongolia 2 (Bayarjargal pen 10, pen 64)
HT: 2-1

Jun 30
Taiwan 8 (Wu Chun-ching 30, 56, Chen Wei-chuan 37, Lin Chien-hsun 40, 64, 81, 90+2, Chen Yi-wei 45+1)
Northern Mariana Islands 1 (Schuler 90)
HT: 4-0
Sent off: Miller (Northern Mariana Islands) 45+2

Jul 2
Northern Mariana Islands 1 (Griffin pen 11)
Macau 3 (Lam Ka Seng 9, 90+4, Duarte 40)
HT: 1-2

Jul 2
Mongolia 0
Taiwan 2 (Lin Chien-hsun 57, Lin Shih-kai 90)
HT: 0-0
Sent off: Altankhuyag (Mongolia) 71

Jul 4
Northern Mariana Islands 0
Mongolia 8 (Bayarjargal pen 27, pen 36, Nyam-Osor 40, Daginaa 45, Tuguldur 54, 55, 84, Erdenebat 79)
HT: 0-4

Jul 4
Taiwan 3 (Lin Chien-hsun 36, 64, Tseng Chih-wei 88)
Macau 2 (Chan Man 7, Lei Ka Him 77)
HT: 1-1

EAST ASIAN CUP QUALS – 1ST PRLM RND – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Taiwan (Q)	3	3	0	0	13	3	9
Mongolia	3	1	1	1	10	4	4
Macau	3	1	1	1	7	6	4
N Mariana Is	3	0	0	3	2	19	0

Taiwan have qualified for the 2nd preliminary round, which Guam, Hong Kong & North Korea enter directly. The winner of the 2nd preliminary round group will qualify for the finals, joining direct entrants China, Japan & South Korea

FRIENDLIES

Friday, June 17
Jun17 - Port Moresby
Papua New Guinea 2 (Semmy 35, 42)
Malaysia 0
HT: 2-0

Wednesday, June 22
Jun 22 - Noumea
New Caledonia 1 (Saiko 20)
Malaysia 2 (Amirul 48, Baddrol 54)
HT: 1-0
Sent off: Azrif (Malaysia) 81; G Bearune (New Caledonia) 88

Sunday, June 26
Jun 26 - Nadi
Fiji 1 (R Krishna 74)
Malaysia 1 (Amri 41)
HT: 0-1

Sunday, July 24
Jul 24 - Tashkent
Uzbekistan 2 (Bikmaev 4, Shomuradov 29)
Iraq 1 (Abubakir 89)
HT: 2-0

Thursday, July 28
Jul 28 - Phnom Penh
Cambodia 2 (Vathanaka 19, Dina 45)
Singapore 1 (Khairul Amri 23)
HT: 2-1
Sent off: Hong (Cambodia) 76

2018 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

AFRICA section

● *5 finals places available*

2nd round

1st legs - Nov11-14, 2015; 2nd legs - Nov14-17, 2015

Angola v South Africa 1-3, 0-1 (agg 1-4)
Benin v Burkina Faso 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)
Botswana v Mali 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)
Burundi v DR Congo 2-3, 2-2 (agg 4-5)
Chad v Egypt 1-0, 0-4 (agg 1-4)
Comoros v Ghana 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Ethiopia v Congo 3-4, 1-2 (agg 4-6)
Kenya v Cape Verde Islands 1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Liberia v Ivory Coast 0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
Libya v Rwanda 1-0, 3-1 (agg 4-1)
Madagascar v Senegal 2-2, 0-3 (agg 2-5)
Mauritania v Tunisia 1-2, 1-2 (agg 2-4)
Morocco v Equatorial Guinea 2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
Mozambique v Gabon 1-0, 0-1 (aet)
(agg 1-1, Gabon 4-3 on pens)
Namibia v Guinea 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
Niger v Cameroon 0-3, 0-0 (agg 0-3)
Sudan v Zambia 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
Swaziland v Nigeria 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Tanzania v Algeria 2-2, 0-7 (agg 2-9)
Togo v Uganda 0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)

3rd round: draw & opening fixtures

Group A
DR Congo, Guinea, Libya, Tunisia

Oct 3, 2016	DR Congo v Libya
	Tunisia v Guinea
Nov 7, 2016	Guinea v DR Congo
	Libya v Tunisia
Aug 28, 2017	Guinea v Libya
	Tunisia v DR Congo

Group B
Algeria, Cameroon, Nigeria, Zambia

Oct 3, 2016	Algeria v Cameroon
	Zambia v Nigeria
Nov 7, 2016	Cameroon v Zambia
	Nigeria v Algeria
Aug 28, 2017	Nigeria v Cameroon
	Zambia v Algeria

Group C
Gabon, Ivory Coast, Mali, Morocco

Oct 3, 2016	Gabon v Morocco
	Ivory Coast v Mali
Nov 7, 2016	Mali v Gabon
	Morocco v Ivory Coast
Aug 28, 2017	Gabon v Ivory Coast
	Morocco v Mali

Group D
Burkina Faso, Cape Verde Islands, Senegal, South Africa

Oct 3, 2016	Burkina Faso v South Africa
	Senegal v Cape Verde Islands
Nov 7, 2016	Cape Verde Is v Burkina Faso
	South Africa v Senegal
Aug 28, 2017	Cape Verde Is v South Africa
	Senegal v Burkina Faso

Group E
Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Uganda

Oct 3, 2016	Congo v Egypt
	Ghana v Uganda
Nov 7, 2016	Egypt v Ghana
	Uganda v Congo
Aug 28, 2017	Ghana v Congo
	Uganda v Egypt

Each team will play 6 games (3x2); games to be completed by Nov 2017

● *The 5 group winners will qualify for the finals*

ASIA section

● *4.5 finals places available*

2nd round: final tables

Group A

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND RD: GP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S Arabia (Q)	8	6	2	0	28	4	20
UAE (Q)	8	5	2	1	25	4	17
Palestine	8	3	3	2	22	6	12
Malaysia	8	1	1	6	3	30	4
East Timor	8	0	2	6	2	36	2

Group B

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND RD: GP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia (Q)	8	7	0	1	29	4	21
Jordan	8	5	1	2	21	7	16
Kyrgyzstan	8	4	2	2	10	8	14
Tajikistan	8	1	2	5	9	20	5
Bangladesh	8	0	1	7	2	32	1

Group C

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND RD: GP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Qatar (Q)	8	7	0	1	29	4	21
China (Q)	8	5	2	1	27	1	17
Hong Kong	8	4	2	2	13	5	14
Maldives	8	2	0	6	8	20	6
Bhutan	8	0	0	8	5	52	0

Group D

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND RD: GP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran (Q)	8	6	2	0	26	3	20
Oman	8	4	2	2	11	7	14
Turkmenistan	8	4	1	3	10	11	13
Guam	8	2	1	5	3	16	7
India	8	1	0	7	5	18	3

Group E

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND RD: GP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan (Q)	8	7	1	0	27	0	22
Syria (Q)	8	6	0	2	26	11	18
Singapore	8	3	1	4	9	9	10
Afghanistan	8	3	0	5	8	24	9
Cambodia	8	0	0	8	1	27	0

Group F

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND RD: GP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Thailand (Q)	6	4	2	0	14	6	14
Iraq (Q)	6	3	3	0	13	6	12
Vietnam	6	2	1	3	7	8	7
Taiwan	6	0	0	6	5	19	0

Indonesia excluded after FA was suspended by FIFA for government interference

Group G

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND RD: GP G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sth Korea (Q)	8	8	0	0	27	0	24
Lebanon	8	3	2	3	12	6	11
Kuwait	8	3	1	4	12	10	10
Myanmar	8	2	2	4	9	21	8
Laos	8	1	1	6	6	29	4

Group H

2018 WC QUALS – ASIA – 2ND RD: GP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uzbekistan (Q)	8	7	0	1	20	7	21
North Korea	8	5	1	2	14	8	16
Philippines	8	3	1	4	8	12	10
Bahrain	8	3	0	5	10	10	9
Yemen	8	1	0	7	2	17	3

● *The 8 group winners and the 4 runners-up with the best record (against the teams finishing 1st, 3rd and 4th in the respective groups) qualified for the 3rd round*

3rd round: draw & opening fixtures

Group A

China, Iran, Qatar, South Korea, Syria, Uzbekistan

Sep 1, 2016 Iran v Qatar
South Korea v China
Uzbekistan v Syria
Sep 6, 2016 China v Iran
Qatar v Uzbekistan
Syria v South Korea
Oct 6, 2016 China v Syria
South Korea v Qatar
Uzbekistan v Iran
Oct 11, 2016 Iran v South Korea
Qatar v Syria
Uzbekistan v China

Group B

Australia, Iraq, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, United Arab Emirates

Sep 1, 2016 Australia v Iraq
Japan v United Arab Emirates
Saudi Arabia v Thailand
Sep 6, 2016 Iraq v Saudi Arabia
Thailand v Japan
United Arab Emirates v Australia
Oct 6, 2016 Japan v Iraq
Saudi Arabia v Australia
United Arab Emirates v Thailand
Oct 11, 2016 Australia v Japan
Iraq v Thailand
S Arabia v United Arab Emirates

Each team will play10 games (5x2); games to be completed by Sep 2017

● *The top 2 in both groups will qualify for the finals; the 2 3rd-placed countries will meet in the* **Asia section play-off**, *the winner of which will meet the 4th-placed CONCACAF country in a play-off for a place in the finals*

CONCACAF section

● *3.5 finals places available*

4th round

Group A

2018 WC QUALS – CONCACAF – 4TH RND: GP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico (Q)	4	4	0	0	10	0	12
Honduras	4	1	1	2	4	5	4
Canada	4	1	1	2	1	5	4
El Salvador	4	0	2	2	2	7	2

Full results & fixtures

Nov 13, 2015 Canada v Honduras 1-0
Mexico v El Salvador 3-0
Nov 17, 2015 El Salvador v Canada 0-0
Honduras v Mexico 0-2
Mar 25, 2016 Canada v Mexico 0-3
El Salvador v Honduras 2-2
Mar 29, 2016 Honduras v El Salvador 2-0
Mexico v Canada 2-0
Sep 2, 2016 El Salvador v Mexico
Honduras v Canada
Sep 6, 2016 Canada v El Salvador
Mexico v Honduras

Group B

2018 WC QUALS – CONCACAF – 4TH RND: GP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Panama	4	2	1	1	4	2	7
Jamaica	4	1	1	2	2	6	4
Haiti	4	0	1	3	0	3	1

Full results & fixtures

Nov 13, 2015 Costa Rica v Haiti 1-0
Jamaica v Panama 0-2
Nov 17, 2015 Haiti v Jamaica 0-1
Panama v Costa Rica 1-2
Mar 25, 2016 Haiti v Panama 0-0
Jamaica v Costa Rica 1-1
Mar 29, 2016 Costa Rica v Jamaica 3-0
Panama v Haiti 1-0
Sep 2, 2016 Haiti v Costa Rica
Panama v Jamaica
Sep 6, 2016 Costa Rica v Panama
Jamaica v Haiti

Group C

2018 WC QUALS – CONCACAF – 4TH RND: GP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Trinidad & T	4	3	1	0	11	3	10
United States	4	2	1	1	10	3	7
Guatemala	4	2	0	2	7	6	6
St Vincent & G	4	0	0	4	3	19	0

Full results & fixtures

Nov 13, 2015 Guatemala v Trinidad & Tob 1-2
USA v St Vincent & G 6-1
Nov 17, 2015 St Vincent & G v Guatemala 0-4
Trinidad & Tob v USA 0-0
Mar 25, 2016 Guatemala v USA 2-0
St Vincent & G v Trinidad & T 2-3
Mar 29, 2016 Trinidad & T v St Vincent & G 6-0
USA v Guatemala 4-0
Sep 2, 2016 St Vincent & G v USA
Trinidad & Tob v Guatemala
Sep 6, 2016 Guatemala v St Vincent & G
USA v Trinidad & Tobago

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 5th round*

5th round

The 6 qualifiers will form a single group (games to be played Nov 2016–Oct 2017)

● *The top 3 will qualify for the finals; the 4th-placed country will meet the winner of the Asia section play-off in a play-off for a place in the finals*

EUROPE section

● *13 finals places available (excluding the place for hosts* **Russia**, *who qualify automatically)*

Draw & opening fixtures

Group A

Belarus, Bulgaria, France, Holland, Luxembourg, Sweden

Sep 6, 2016 Belarus v France
Bulgaria v Luxembourg
Sweden v Holland
Oct 7, 2016 France v Bulgaria
Holland v Belarus
Luxembourg v Sweden
Oct 10, 2016 Belarus v Luxembourg
Holland v France
Sweden v Bulgaria
Nov 11, 2016 France v Sweden
Nov 13, 2016 Bulgaria v Belarus
Luxembourg v Holland

Group B

Andorra, Faroe Islands, Hungary, Latvia, Portugal, Switzerland

Sep 6, 2016 Andorra v Latvia
Faroe Islands v Hungary
Switzerland v Portugal
Oct 7, 2016 Hungary v Switzerland
Latvia v Faroe Islands
Portugal v Andorra
Oct 10, 2016 Andorra v Switzerland
Faroe Islands v Portugal
Latvia v Hungary
Nov 13, 2016 Hungary v Andorra
Portugal v Latvia
Switzerland v Faroe Islands

Group C

Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Germany, Northern Ireland, Norway, San Marino

Sep 4, 2016 Czech Rep v Northern Ireland
Norway v Germany
San Marino v Azerbaijan
Oct 8, 2016 Azerbaijan v Norway
Germany v Czech Republic
Northern Ireland v San Marino
Oct 11, 2016 Czech Republic v Azerbaijan
Germany v Northern Ireland
Norway v San Marino
Nov 11, 2016 Czech Republic v Norway
Northern Ireland v Azerbaijan
San Marino v Germany

Group D

Austria, Georgia, Moldova, Republic of Ireland, Serbia, Wales

Sep 5, 2016 Georgia v Austria
Serbia v Republic of Ireland
Wales v Moldova
Oct 6, 2016 Austria v Wales
Moldova v Serbia
Republic of Ireland v Georgia
Oct 9, 2016 Moldova v Republic of Ireland
Serbia v Austria
Wales v Georgia
Nov 12, 2016 Austria v Republic of Ireland
Georgia v Moldova
Wales v Serbia

Group E

Armenia, Denmark, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Poland, Romania

Sep 4, 2016 Denmark v Armenia
Kazakhstan v Poland
Romania v Montenegro
Oct 8, 2016 Armenia v Romania
Montenegro v Kazakhstan
Poland v Denmark
Oct 11, 2016 Denmark v Montenegro
Kazakhstan v Romania
Poland v Armenia
Nov 11, 2016 Armenia v Montenegro
Denmark v Kazakhstan
Romania v Poland

Group F

England, Lithuania, Malta, Scotland, Slovakia, Slovenia

Sep 4, 2016 Lithuania v Slovenia
Malta v Scotland
Slovakia v England
Oct 8, 2016 England v Malta
Scotland v Lithuania
Slovenia v Slovakia
Oct 11, 2016 Lithuania v Malta
Slovakia v Scotland
Slovenia v England
Nov 11, 2016 England v Scotland
Malta v Slovenia
Slovakia v Lithuania

Group G

Albania, Israel, Italy, Liechtenstein, Macedonia, Spain

Sep 5, 2016 Albania v Macedonia
Israel v Italy
Spain v Liechtenstein
Oct 6, 2016 Italy v Spain
Liechtenstein v Albania
Macedonia v Israel
Oct 9, 2016 Albania v Spain
Israel v Liechtenstein
Macedonia v Italy
Nov 12, 2016 Albania v Israel
Liechtenstein v Italy
Spain v Macedonia

Group H

Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, Estonia, Gibraltar, Greece

Sep 6, 2016 Bosnia-Herzegovina v Estonia
Cyprus v Belgium
Gibraltar v Greece
Oct 7, 2016 Belgium v Bosnia-Herzegovina
Estonia v Gibraltar
Greece v Cyprus
Oct 10, 2016 Bosnia-Herzegovina v Cyprus
Estonia v Greece
Gibraltar v Belgium
Nov 13, 2016 Belgium v Estonia
Cyprus v Gibraltar
Greece v Bosnia-Herzegovina

Group I

Croatia, Finland, Iceland, Kosovo, Turkey, Ukraine

Sep 5, 2016 Croatia v Turkey
Finland v Kosovo
Ukraine v Iceland
Oct 6, 2016 Iceland v Finland
Kosovo v Croatia
Turkey v Ukraine
Oct 9, 2016 Finland v Croatia
Iceland v Turkey
Ukraine v Kosovo
Nov 12, 2016 Croatia v Iceland
Turkey v Kosovo
Ukraine v Finland

Each team will play10 games (5x2); games to be completed by Oct 2017

● *The 9 group winners will qualify for the finals; the 8 runners-up with the best record (against the teams finishing1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th in the respective groups) will be paired in 4 play-offs, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals*

OCEANIA section

● *0.5 finals places available*

2nd round: final tables

Group A

WC QUALS – OCEANIA – 2ND RND: GP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Papua NG (Q)	3	1	2	0	11	3	5
N Caledonia (Q)	3	1	2	0	9	2	5
Tahiti (Q)	3	1	2	0	7	3	5
Samoa	3	0	0	3	0	19	0

Group B

WC QUALS – OCEANIA – 2ND RND: GP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
N Zealand (Q)	3	3	0	0	9	1	9
Solomon Is (Q)	3	1	0	2	1	2	3
Fiji (Q)	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
Vanuatu	3	1	0	2	3	8	3

● *The top 3 in both groups qualified for the 3rd round*

3rd round: draw

Group A

Fiji, New Caledonia, New Zealand

Group B

Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tahiti

Each team will play 4 games (2x2); games to be played Nov 2016–June 2017

● *The 2 group winners will qualify for the play-off round*

Play-off round

The 2 qualifiers will meet in a play-off

● *The play-off round winner will meet the 5th-placed South American country in a play-off for a place in the finals*

SOUTH AMERICA section

● *4.5 finals places available*

2018 WC QUALS – SOUTH AMERICA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uruguay	6	4	1	1	12	4	13
Ecuador	6	4	1	1	12	7	13
Argentina	6	3	2	1	6	4	11
Chile	6	3	1	2	12	10	10
Colombia	6	3	1	2	9	8	10
Brazil	6	2	3	1	11	8	9
Paraguay	6	2	3	1	7	6	9
Peru	6	1	1	4	6	12	4
Bolivia	6	1	0	5	7	13	3
Venezuela	6	0	1	5	7	17	1

Each team will play18 games (9x2); games to be completed by Oct 2017

● *The top 4 will qualify for the finals; the 5th-placed country will meet the Oceania play-off round winner in a play-off for a place in the finals*

Full results to date

Oct 8, 2015	Argentina v Ecuador	0-2
	Bolivia v Uruguay	0-2
	Chile v Brazil	2-0
	Colombia v Peru	2-0
	Venezuela v Paraguay	0-1
Oct 13, 2015	Brazil v Venezuela	3-1
	Ecuador v Bolivia	2-0
	Paraguay v Argentina	0-0
	Peru v Chile	3-4
	Uruguay v Colombia	3-0
Nov 12, 2015	Bolivia v Venezuela	4-2
	Chile v Colombia	1-1
	Ecuador v Uruguay	2-1
Nov 13, 2015	Argentina v Brazil	1-1
	Peru v Paraguay	1-0
Nov 17, 2015	Brazil v Peru	3-0
	Colombia v Argentina	0-1
	Paraguay v Bolivia	2-1
	Uruguay v Chile	3-0
	Venezuela v Ecuador	1-3
Mar 24, 2016	Bolivia v Colombia	2-3
	Chile v Argentina	1-2
	Ecuador v Paraguay	2-2
	Peru v Venezuela	2-2
Mar 25, 2016	Brazil v Uruguay	2-2
Mar 29, 2016	Argentina v Bolivia	2-0
	Colombia v Ecuador	3-1
	Paraguay v Brazil	2-2
	Uruguay v Peru	1-0
	Venezuela v Chile	1-4

Next 4 rounds of fixtures

Sep 1, 2016	Argentina v Uruguay
	Bolivia v Peru
	Colombia v Venezuela
	Ecuador v Brazil
	Paraguay v Chile
Sep 6, 2016	Brazil v Colombia
	Chile v Bolivia
	Peru v Ecuador
	Uruguay v Paraguay
	Venezuela v Argentina
Oct 6, 2016	Brazil v Bolivia
	Ecuador v Chile
	Paraguay v Colombia
	Peru v Argentina
	Uruguay v Venezuela
Oct 11, 2016	Argentina v Paraguay
	Bolivia v Ecuador
	Chile v Peru
	Colombia v Uruguay
	Venezuela v Brazil

2017 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS

Current standings & remaining fixtures

Group A

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liberia	5	3	1	1	10	4	10
Tunisia	5	3	1	1	12	2	10
Togo	5	2	2	1	6	4	8
Djibouti	5	0	0	5	1	19	0

Sep 2-4, 2016 Togo v Djibouti
Tunisia v Liberia

Group B

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
DR Congo	5	4	0	1	12	5	12
Cent Af Rep	5	3	1	1	8	7	10
Angola	5	1	1	3	6	7	4
Madagascar	5	0	2	3	4	11	2

Sep 2-4, 2016 Angola v Madagascar
DR Congo v Central African Rep

Group C

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mali (Q)	5	4	1	0	8	1	13
Benin	5	3	2	0	10	5	11
South Sudan	5	1	0	4	3	11	3
Equat Guinea	5	0	1	4	2	6	1

Sep 2-4, 2016 Equatorial Guinea v South Sudan
Mali v Benin

Group D

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burkina Faso	5	3	1	1	4	1	10
Uganda	5	3	1	1	5	2	10
Botswana	5	2	0	3	4	6	6
Comoros	5	1	0	4	2	6	3

Sep 2-4, 2016 Burkina Faso v Botswana
Uganda v Comoros

Group E

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
G-Bissau (Q)	5	3	1	1	7	6	10
Congo	5	1	3	1	8	7	6
Zambia	5	1	3	1	6	6	6
Kenya	5	1	1	3	4	6	4

Sep 2-4, 2016 Congo v Guinea-Bissau
Zambia v Kenya

Group F

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco (Q)	5	4	1	0	8	1	13
Cape Verde Is	5	3	0	2	11	6	9
Libya	5	1	1	3	7	6	4
Sao Tome e P	5	1	0	4	4	17	3

Sep 2-4, 2016 Cape Verde Islands v Libya
Morocco v Sao Tome e Principe

Group G

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP G	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt (Q)	4	3	1	0	7	1	10
Nigeria	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Tanzania	3	0	1	2	0	5	1

Chad withdrew after 3rd game; results expunged

Sep 2-4, 2016 Nigeria v Tanzania

Group H

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana (Q)	5	4	1	0	13	2	13
Rwanda	5	2	0	3	8	5	6
Mauritius	5	2	0	3	3	14	6
Mozambique	5	1	1	3	4	7	4

Sep 2-4, 2016 Ghana v Rwanda
Mozambique v Mauritius

Group I

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP I	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Sierra Leone	3	1	1	1	1	1	4
Sudan	4	1	1	2	2	3	4

Sep 2-4, 2016 Ivory Coast v Sierra Leone

Group J

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP J	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria (Q)	5	4	1	0	19	5	13
Ethiopia	5	2	2	1	9	13	8
Seychelles	5	1	1	3	4	9	4
Lesotho	5	1	0	4	5	10	3

Sep 2-4, 2016 Algeria v Lesotho
Ethiopia v Seychelles

Group K

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP K	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal (Q)	5	5	0	0	11	2	15
Burundi	5	2	0	3	7	9	6
Namibia	5	2	0	3	5	7	6
Niger	5	1	0	4	2	7	3

Sep 2-4, 2016 Niger v Burundi
Senegal v Namibia

Group L

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP L	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zimbabwe (Q)	5	3	2	0	11	3	11
Swaziland	5	2	2	1	6	8	8
Guinea	5	1	2	2	4	5	5
Malawi	5	0	2	3	4	9	2

Sep 2-4, 2016 Guinea v Zimbabwe
Malawi v Swaziland

Group M

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS – GROUP M	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cameroon (Q)	5	3	2	0	5	2	11
Mauritania	5	2	1	2	5	4	7
South Africa	5	1	3	1	7	5	6
Gambia	5	0	2	3	1	7	2

Sep 2-4, 2016 Cameroon v Gambia
South Africa v Mauritania

● *The13 group winners and the 2 runners-up with the best record (excluding those from 3-team groups) will qualify for the16-team finals. Hosts* **Gabon** *qualify automatically*

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage

September 2016 Vol 56 No 13

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Thanks this issue to
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Periodicals paid at Rahway, NJ Postmaster: send address changes to *World Soccer*, c/o MAIL America, 365 Blair Road, Avenel NJ 07001, USA. USPS004075

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World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

JULY 4, 1954, BERNE: WORLD CUP FINAL

West Germany 3 Hungary 2

The 'Miracle of Berne' as Germany stage a remarkable comeback

World champions...West German captain Fritz Walter with the trophy

This was the second meeting between these two nations at the 1954 World Cup in Switzerland, with Hungary having won emphatically in the first match, beating Sepp Herberger's side 8-3 in Basle with four goals from Sandor Kocsis. However, rumours abounded that the West German coach had deliberately fielded a weakened team for that group game, knowing full well that the teams could face one another again in the latter stages.

Despite appalling weather at the Wankdorf Stadium, both teams managed to play attractive, attacking football in the Final. Hungary's Ferenc Puskas, although not fully fit, insisted on playing and put Hungary ahead, with Zoltan Czibor doubling the lead two minutes later.

The Germans responded almost immediately through Max Morlock and then Helmut Rahn made it 2-2 with under 20 minutes played.

Hungary came back strongly and were denied twice by the woodwork. West Germany goalkeeper Toni Turek also made a string of outstanding saves – and when he was finally beaten, left-back Werner Kohlmeyer was there to clear off the line.

Herberger's men weathered the storm and, with just over five minutes left, Rahn struck to put the Germans ahead with his second goal of the game.

There was still time for Hungary to find the net again, through Puskas, but his delight turned to despair as Welsh linesman Sandy Griffiths flagged for offside.

That would be the last of the action, and when English referee William Ling blew the final whistle it signalled Hungary's first defeat in four years, ending an unbeaten run of 31 matches.

As German captain Fritz Walter collected the Jules Rimet trophy, his Hungarian counterpart Puskas was the first to walk up and shake his hand. WS

Pressure...Hungary keeper Gyula Grosics

Referee: Ling (Eng)

KEY MOMENTS

6 min A shot by Sandor Kocsis is deflected by Horst Eckel into the path of Ferenc Puskas who scores to put Hungary ahead. **0-1**

8 min Werner Kolmeyer passes back to his goalkeeper, Toni Turek, who fumbles the ball, allowing Zoltan Czibor to steal in and snatch a second goal for Hungary. **0-2**

10 min A left-wing cross by Helmut Rahn deflects off of Jozsef Zakarias and into the path of Max Morlock, who taps in for West Germany. **1-2**

Equaliser...Helmut Rahn (left) celebrates

18 min Hungary fail to clear a Fritz Walter corner and Rahn scores at the far post from close range. **2-2**

24 min Turek makes a brilliant one-handed save from a Nandor Hidegkuti header at close range.

35 min Hidegkuti hits a post for Hungary from just inside the German penalty area.

Opportunity...Nandor Hidegkuti goes close

51 min Mihaly Toth of Hungary sees his shot cleared off the line by West German left-back Kohlmeyer.

57 min A deep, looping cross from the right by Puskas is headed onto the crossbar by Kocsis.

84 min Rahn grabs his second goal of the game when he latches on to a loose ball and fires home low into the corner. **3-2**

88 min Puskas has the ball in the net for Hungary, but the linesman's flag is up for offside.

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